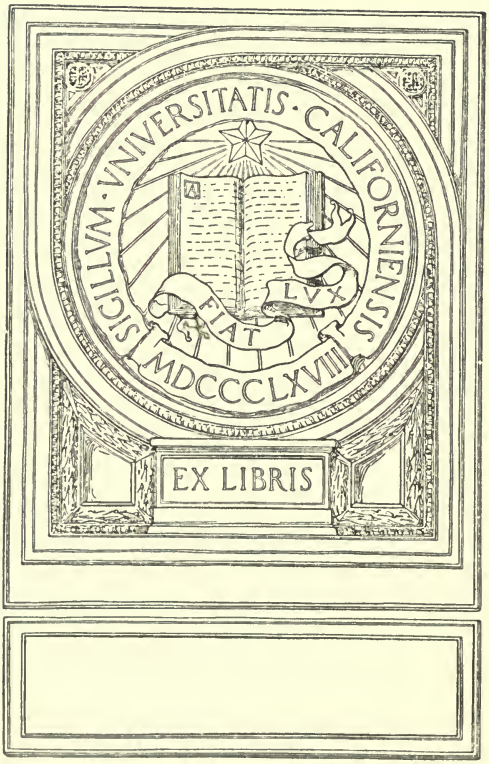
# THE THROWBACK

ALFRED HENRY LEWIS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# THE THROWBACK

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*"Pedro of the Ear," cried Moonlight, "I owed you that."*

# THE THROWBACK

## A ROMANCE OF THE SOUTHWEST

BY

ALFRED HENRY LEWIS

Author of "Wolfville," "Peggy O'Neal," "The President," "The Sunset Trail," etc.

*ILLUSTRATED WITH A FRONTISPIECE IN COLOR AND THREE OTHER PICTURES FROM PAINTINGS BY N. C. WYETH*

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# THE THROWBACK

## CHAPTER I

### ON THE FAR CANADIAN

Robert Blainey on a brisk October afternoon was pushing his slow way westward along that yellow strip of wagon track, ribboned between the Canadian and the ragged fringe of the Staked Plains, and known as the Old Fort Bascomb Trail. The vehicle in which he rode—a light surrey—besides the negro driver, carried in addition to himself a stout woman, extremely the lady in look, and of more than middle weight and years. This lady was old enough to be the mother of Robert Blainey. She had been so fortunate, however, as to escape such relationship, while sharing most of its ill consequences, and was of no nearer kin to him than just aunt on his dead mother's side of the family. Her name was Matilda Hempstead, and in that strip of country along the Chesapeake known as the Eastern Shore, she had been looked up to and obeyed as "Aunt Tilda."

Aunt Tilda had the dominant air of one determined to rise superior to what difficulties should be presented by new and untried surroundings. Robert

on his side wore brows of gloom, as one already dissatisfied and who, while disgruntled with the present, divided what capacity for emotion remained with him between regret for what was behind and distrust as to what lay before.

Off a trifle to the rear and right of the surrey, a young girl was riding a coal-black saddle pony. You would have guessed her age as seventeen. Her girlish beauty was of the kind termed striking—with her rounded form, fresh cheeks, brown deep eyes, and rice-white teeth showing between the rich fullness of damask lips.

Ethel Pryce was the foster-daughter of Aunt Tilda; and her sweet face, with oval chin, eyes at an encouraging distance from one another, small aristocratic nose a trifle tip-tilted, told of pride and courage and romance and honesty, and withal a fathomless power for the love that encounters all things, flags not, and is faithful unto death. With the pretty Ethel, however, on that particular October afternoon, the soft question of love was restrained and limited to a mere fact of power; for no man's memory invoked a sigh from the virgin lips, no man's image was traced upon the untried virgin heart.

"This is a passing strange country, Robert," observed Aunt Tilda a bit wearily, casting her glance toward the tumbling river, and then where the jagged broken hills showed like saw teeth against the southern sky. "Although," she added, following a pause, "I suppose that after we've got settled in our new home—the Bar-Z you called it, I think—the strangeness will wear away. Still, it's a discouraging con-

trast to the rich green of old Somerset—this country, so sterile and gray and poor!"

"I shall never forgive Uncle Gordon," exclaimed Robert, bursting into a sudden flame of passion, "for driving us hither."

"Uncle Gordon! Why should you charge him with driving us here? It was you who urged our coming; and for the matter of that I see nothing to prevent our home-going to-morrow, should we so resolve."

"True, Aunt, so far as you and Ethel are concerned," rejoined Robert, his manner a trifle improved, though peevish and fault-finding; "and I ought perhaps to thank you for bearing me company in this exile. But take my own case: How was I to remain in Somerset under those changed conditions made by Uncle Gordon's death?—conditions which he, in selfish disregard of what I might suffer, constructed and cast about me."

"Now you are far from just to your Uncle Gordon." Aunt Tilda spoke in a manner of steady reproof. "His will gives you twenty thousand dollars in hand; and its purpose is to pass you over the entire estate, its lands and its moneys and all that belongs with it, at the end of ten years."

"'At the end of ten years!' You fail to remember that in event of the runagate Alan turning up, it goes every stiver to him."

"There is, I fear, small hope of Alan coming back. I make no doubt the poor unhappy boy is dead these years gone. But if he were alive, and returned, why should you complain of Uncle Gordon? Is it so un-

natural that a father should prefer his own son for his own acres, rather than leave them to a nephew?"

Robert and the others, at the time one finds them were nearing their journey's end. The Bar-Z ranch was no more than a day's travel ahead—a slow day's travel, too, since the pace was regulated by two six-mule teams. These latter toiled behind the surrey at a snail's-gait, each team drawing two great Bain wagons, hooked up lead-and-trail, and loaded to their canvas tilts with what furnishings and house-belongings the prudence of Aunt Tilda had decided upon. Altogether, with Ethel and her pony Jet, the surrey carrying Aunt Tilda and Robert, and the quartette of heavy wagons bringing up the creaking rear, the caravan presented no mean spectacle.

The muster of the little party must be strengthened to the extent of one who, up to this point has had no mention. This personage was a certain fish out of water, *videlicet* one Ptolemy Doremus, A.M., professor of Greek and Latin, and of Mathematics, in that ancient temple of learning, the College of William and Mary. It was in the guileless bosom of Ptolemy Doremus to see new lands and peoples. Moreover he was a passionate naturalist; and it was—so he declared—to study the flora and fauna of the Texas Panhandle, that he made himself a member of the company.

Folk with a bias for romance might have placed the presence of Ptolemy Doremus on more dulcet grounds. There had been a day long before when he numbered himself among those many who sighed in the wake—the girlish, obdurate wake of Aunt Tilda.

It was not his fault that she took the name of Hempstead. He did what he knew to win her. Failing, he went no more afield with his affections, but lived a musty bachelor, buried to the brows in musty books, for her dear sake. There were those who argued that the love of Ptolemy Doremus for Aunt Tilda never died. They said that he housed it in his heart, as something harmless at once and precious, tending its sacred fires like a devotee.

An innocent old gentleman of the old Virginia school was Ptolemy Doremus. Through her wifehood and subsequent widowhood he had maintained, unbroken, his friendship for Aunt Tilda—a friendship hedged about by an elaborate respect. When he was told of Robert's Southwestern intentions, and how Aunt Tilda would go, he decided upon an indefinite leave of absence from his duties at William and Mary. Calling himself a naturalist, and never once a lover, he had asked Robert and Aunt Tilda for leave to accompany them.

"All my life," said he, "I've been mad to study, first-hand, the plant and animal life of northwestern Texas, and this offers the precise chance for which I've hungered."

Aunt Tilda smiled a smile of tolerant benevolence, for she felt the compliment of his request. She was willing he should disguise the motive, and give coyote and cactus, mesquite and scorpion, as the eager reasons of his pilgrimage. For all that, her woman's prescience was not to be blinded. Thorny, savage, poisonous, neither coyote nor cactus, neither mesquite nor scorpion, by any most fevered

stretch of the imagination, could be made to serve as a pet term of endearment. And yet she realized in each a tender alias, behind which Ptolemy Doremus would have concealed her. It gratified Aunt Tilda; for every woman is a love-miser, and, though she may not return your love, she will rejoice in its reception, in having it and hoarding it; and whatever the quarter it comes from, only so it be honorable, she can never get enough.

"What has become of Professor Doremus?" suddenly asked Aunt Tilda. She was willing to take Robert out of his peevishness with a change of topic. Moreover, his selfishness as evinced in his condemnations of old Alan Gordon grated on her. "He has been gone from the wagons for a half hour."

"He saw a coyote over on a hill," returned Robert, "and scrambled down to make its nearer acquaintance."

"What an enthusiastic boy's heart the Professor has!" This, with a color of admiration. Then, anxiety again on edge, Aunt Tilda turned to Ethel: "Won't you whip across to those hills, dear, and see if you can find Professor Doremus? In such a desert, so full of hills and hollows, he might lose his way."

"There he is now, Aunt," returned Ethel, pointing with her quirt.

The slim, gray form of the wanderer was visible about a furlong ahead. He was seated on a rock, mopping his bald pate as though his efforts to make the coyote's acquaintance had told on him.

"A splendid specimen," observed the Professor enthusiastically, as the others drew near, "a splendid

specimen of the *canis latrans* or barking wolf." Then, regretfully: "But he would not let me approach him."

The surrey made a pause, and the naturalist took the vacant seat by Cato, the negro driver. That swart functionary, quite as old and gray as Ptolemy Doremus himself, welcomed him with a wide ear-to-ear grin.

"Them coyote-wolves, Professah, am a heap hard to ketch."

"They are indeed, Cato, most restless beasts; and as you say exceeding wary and timid. However, I did not think to catch this one; I only sought a nearer view." The Professor, twisting about in his seat, beamed on Aunt Tilda. "And how, my dear Madam, do you sustain the fatigues of the day?"

"Thank you, Professor," returned Aunt Tilda, "I do better than usual, remembering how near we are to the end of our troubles."

"We stop at Captain Ruggles' ranch to-night," vouchsafed Robert. "We should reach the Bar-Z to-morrow."

The surrey was skirting a point of rocks that, coming well down toward the river, left barely room for the trail. As our party rounded this rude headland they came upon a broad level stretch. It was horseshoe in shape and framed about with gray hills. This expanse, covered with a thick, deep carpet of grass, was studded with giant cottonwoods. Standing far apart, and plenty of space between, they made rather a grove than a forest. The rays of the sun, falling slantwise through the branches, checkered the

grass with patterns of light and shadow, that danced like creatures alive as the wind stirred the boughs above.

Suddenly Aunt Tilda gave a startled "Oh!"

By the side of the flashing river, and quite the congruous thing in that horse-shoe emerald flat canopied of its ancient cottonwoods, stood the skin-lodge of an Indian. The savage landlord himself was sitting, blanket-wrapped, on the grass to the left of the lodge-flap or door. He was not a pleasant specimen—with face painted black, a blotch of mud in his hair, and blanket torn and ragged.

In front of the lodge a fire was going. An Indian woman and a girl were busy with some crude cookery. On the fallen trunk of a cottonwood sat a white man, roughly garbed and something past middle years, watching with keen expectant interest the culinary operations of the two squaws. Twenty rods to the rear, another younger white man was employed in twisting rawhide hobbles on a pair of ponies. These latter, fitted with heavy Colorado saddles, belonged, it was plain, to him who attended them, and his hungry-faced elder, sitting on the cottonwood trunk.

As the surrey came into view around the rocky promontory, the squaws and the white men bestowed upon it their curious attention. The ragged mud-daubed one, however, never once looked up, but remained plunged in sadly desperate meditation all his own. He seemed to see no one, neither the squaws of his household nor yet the two white men. As for unexpected surreys rounding points of rock, they were as nothing to him.

The elder white man stood upon his feet, and waved the travelers a cordial invitation to approach.

Cato, a prey to those timid uncertainties that wait on strangers in a strange land, the moment he clapped eyes on that mixed community under the cottonwoods, pulled short up, cheek struck suddenly from black to muddy gray.

"Whoa-a-a!" cried Cato tremulously. Then, appealing to the entire party: "Now whoever does you-all reckon dem outcasts is?"

"Drive on!" commanded Robert impatiently. "What have you halted for?"

"Doan't like d' looks of d' squad settin' about dat cowhide house, Marse Robert!" Cato had been with Aunt Tilda for years, and felt privileged to own and express opinions. "Dem's mighty rannikaboo appearin' people, dat passel of folks is. Speshully d' aboriginal person w'ats got d' soot on his face. Whoa dar, Jinny! Yassir, Marse Robert, I sort o' allows we-all had better reeconnoiter dat bunch, befo' we goes surgin' into d' middle of 'em. How do you know dey ain't murderers?"

"But Cato," remonstrated Professor Doremus, "can't you see the gentleman making reassuring gestures? He seems affable and friendly."

"Can't tell nuthin' from dat, Professah. D' wickedest dawg 'll wag his tail."

## CHAPTER II

### OLD TOM MOONLIGHT

"Go on, you black idiot!" again commanded Robert.

"Whoa-a-a!" repeated the fear-struck Cato, heedless of Robert, in his terror.

The two mules that furnished the motive-power of the surrey, nothing loath, stood fast, switching their ridiculous tails like paint-brushes. The six-mule teams lounged heavily up, and taking their cue from the surrey came also to a standstill. The affable personage by the fire continued meanwhile his pantomimic invitations.

Professor Doremus, who sympathized with poor Cato's timidities while in no wise sharing them, sought to encourage the old darky.

"Do as your master bids," he urged. "There's nothing to apprehend from these simple people. One might tell as much from their looks."

"It's d' way dey're jumbled together skeers me," returned Cato. "When I sees white folks an' red folks mixed up, same as that clanjamfrey under d' trees, it jes' nacherally calls out my prudence. An' as for their looks, Professah: Sho! you can't pick out a man by d' looks any more'n you can pick out a watermelon by d' looks."

Here Robert used more strong language, and might

have used bad, had it not been for the repressive presence of Aunt Tilda. As for that lady herself, these were her first Indians; and her feelings kept somewhat abreast of Cato's.

Professor Doremus broke the deadlock by reaching for the reins.

"If you won't drive on, I will," said he.

Cato, making a virtue of necessity, started the team toward that alarming group.

Professor Doremus was first out of the surrey, managing his descent with a wooden agility that spoke of both his ardor and his years.

"Permit me, my dear Madam!" said he, assisting Aunt Tilda to the ground.

"That's right, folks," cried the pantomimic one; "it'll do you good to stretch your laigs." Then to Professor Doremus: "What may I call you, stranger?"

Professor Doremus politely responded with a card.

"Sir, my name is Doremus, at your service—Ptolemy Doremus of William and Mary College, Virginia."

"Virginny!" commented the pantomimic one, inspecting the card. "You're a long day's ride, pard, from your range!" Then pointing to the "A.M.," "what's them?—your brand?"

"They signify Master of Arts," responded Professor Doremus, gravely. "They are supposed to mark a certain degree of erudition."

"Shake!" cried the pantomimic one, grasping the hand of Professor Doremus. "Which I shorely do enjoy meetin' a eddicated gent. My name's Jeff

Horne, and since I don't pack no pasteboard, you'll sort o' have to take my word for it I reckon. Glad to see you, marm!" he continued, removing his wide chihuahua hat in compliment to Aunt Tilda. Then, as though seeking a favor: "As soon as you-all feels well enough acquainted to do so, jest call me Jeff. I'm sort o' partial to that name."

Aunt Tilda, Professor Doremus and Jeff Horne bowed and scraped as though the grass beneath and the arched boughs overhead made up some drawing-room, and that chance-blown collision by the Canadian were a planned and formal function. The two squaws, crouching by the fire, reviewed these ceremonies with deep interest, beaming aboriginally.

Robert, who had left none of his superciliousness in Somerset, did not alight from the surrey. He had decided that the welcoming Mr. Horne and his companions were of an inferior caste, and felt it due his dignity to maintain toward them a degree of reserve.

Ethel, who had been lagging behind in dreamy appreciation of the picturesque, now cantered smartly up. Both Professor Doremus and the polite Jeff made as though to take her from the saddle. She did not want their aid, but sprang lightly to the grass. She and the Indian girl gazed at each other, a flush of mutual interest, belonging with their sex and years, showing in the cheeks of both. Also, both had soft brown eyes, bright as stars; but with a difference. Ethel's eyes had been deepened and ennobled by centuries of civilization, while the other's were gently wild like the eyes of a deer.

Professor Doremus made a courteous gesture

toward the soot-visaged one, who throughout had maintained his stolid and inert demeanor, as though what was passing were the April chirpings of a frog pond.

"And he," observed the Professor, "is, I take it, the proprietor of this unique edifice. May I crave his name?"

"Shore!" returned Jeff. "His name's Ironjacket. These yere are his squaw an' daughter."

Professor Doremus put on his spectacles for a better look at the household of Ironjacket; for his concern as a naturalist covered Kiowas as well as coyotes.

"Yere!" exclaimed Jeff, "I'll give you-all an introduction in regulation style." Then, with a flourish caught from those Chesterfields, the floor managers in the dance-halls, he proceeded: "Professor Doremus, let me give you a knockdown to Mrs. Southwind, and Miss Firelight, both esteemable ladies of the Kiowa tribe."

"How!" murmured the squaws, bashfully offering small brown paws.

Following this acknowledgment, Firelight shrunk away like a rabbit before those learned spectacles. She seemed inclined to find safety behind Ethel, discerning perils, formless yet profound, in that glassy stare.

"And the sept," observed the Professor, removing the mysterious glasses to the vast relief of both Southwing and the young Firelight—"the sept to which these interesting beings belong is, you say, the Kiowa?"

"C'rrect!" responded Jeff; "Kiowa is their tribe. The partic'lar band they belong to is some'ers over on the Rabbit Ear."

"And is he a chief?" asked Aunt Tilda, pointing to the unregarding Ironjacket, and sinking her voice out of respect for that warrior; "is he the leader of his people?"

"No," replied Jeff, considering the soot-faced personage under discussion with a mien both cool and calm, and not at all sinking his voice; "no, he ain't the chief. Wolf Robe 's their chief. Just the same, this yere Ironjacket is what you might call a leadin' citizen."

"And the black on his visage," remarked the Professor, again donning his spectacles for a survey of Ironjacket, "is, I take it, significant of mourning. His manner of grief-wrapped abstraction would suggest as much. Was it a near relative?"

"No relative at all." The loquacious Jeff then explained that the woe of Ironjacket had a deeper reason than one so savagely commonplace as the death of any relative, however near. "It's his 'medicine,'" he concluded. "This Ironjacket's gone shy his 'medicine.' An' that, Professor, is about the worst loss that can overtake an Injun."

"His medicine!" exclaimed the Professor, all concern in a moment. "From what malady is he suffering? I've some little skill in surgery, and we have a chest of drugs. Perhaps I can prescribe something that will bring him relief."

"No, no, Professor," protested Jeff; "you're barkin' at a knot. He ain't sick. It's his medicine

bag—a kind of fetish—that's lost. When you saveys Injuns, it'll be as plain to your understanding as the river out yonder. For an Injun to lose his medicine, is the same as for a white man to lose his money; it leaves him plunged in disrepoote. Bein', as I explains, disgraced that-away, this yere Ironjacket has blacked his face, daubed that splotch of mud in his hair, put on his raggedest blanket, and pulled off to one side by himself sort o' hidin' his shame."

This picture touched the sensibilities of Aunt Tilda.

"Poor man!" she said, voice full of feeling. "Is there no consolation one can offer?"

"None, marm, none! Injuns is so much like mules that, if they're sick, you can't cure 'em, an' if they're sad you can't console 'em. Injuns an' mules are born plumb outside of every softer hooman inflooence." After considering the sorrowful one a moment, Jeff continued: "Not, of course, but what Ironjacket has his chance open. He may knock over some Comanche or some Cheyenne d'ye see; in which event he nacherally fits himself out with that deceased person's 'medicine.' Now if he was to show up on the Rabbit Ear, equipped with a Comanche or a Cheyenne 'medicine' won in fight, why he'd be aces-up with that Kiowa outfit in a moment."

"Shocking!" cried the Professor, beginning to distaste the somber Ironjacket. "Nothing, you say, save murder, can rehabilitate him! Shocking! It's like offering a premium for homicide!"

"Shore!" acquiesced Jeff, composedly. "Homicide an' hoss-stealin' that-away is what all Injuns is born to."

It developed, as the talk took wider range, that Jeff and his young comrade—the latter still busy about the two ponies—were only callers at the camp of Ironjacket.

"Not that the visit is altogether casooal," explained Jeff. "My *compadre* downed an antelope as we comes up the trail, an' we told Southwind here that we'd stake her to the said prong-horn, if she'd roast a hunk for us."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Professor, considering the half-butchered antelope partly hidden in the grass. "Ah! I see! We've had fleeting glimpses of divers specimens during our journey. As I've told you, my dear Madam," he went on, addressing Aunt Tilda, "it is a most curious animal. This particular species, the occidental or Indian antelope, belongs to the family *Talopus Cervicapri.* It was a beast only insufficiently known to the ancients, who placed it on the banks of the Euphrates. It was of importance in the fauna of their heraldry, and described by them as peculiarly savage and fleet. They pictured it as possessing saw-toothed horns wherewith it cut down trees."

"Shake again!" cried Jeff, seizing afresh the hand of Professor Doremus. "What you've said, Professor, goes to show what an eddicated gent really is, only give him room accordin' to his strength. Now I've been killin' an' eatin' prong-horns for forty years; an' you've told me more about 'em in a breath than I could have found out by cross-examinin' the entire Panhandle. Shake!"

Professor Doremus received the plaudits of Jeff with modest warmth. He was even moved to thank

him for the compliments wherewith he showered him.

"And you, too, have studied," he said, for he felt like returning upon the pleasant head of Jeff some portion of encomium—"you, too, I'm sure have studied. If not books, then nature—that most marvelous of books!"

"Right you be, Professor," Jeff replied; "as you put it, I've studied nature. Also I might add that I've not neglected the three 'Rs'."

"Precisely! The three 'Rs'—'Readin', 'Ritin' and 'Rithmetic,' as runs the old jest."

"Wrong, Professor." This with a quizzical grin: "The three 'Rs' to which I alloodes is Rifle, Rope an' Runnin'-iron."

Before Professor Doremus might frame any reply to the autobiographical hint offered by the frankness of his new friend, there came an interruption. Robert had not objected to the halt before the lodge of Ironjacket. It rested the teams; besides he was too well trained in deference to Aunt Tilda, too much in the habit of taking his direction from her in all he did, to dream of such a liberty. He had had no portion in the talk; but that arose partly from want of interest, partly from a conceit of himself. Essentially the churl, he imagined the supercilious to be the superior, and his method of testifying to his own elevation was to ignore such groveling, peasant-creatures as Jeff and his company. Wherefore, wrapped in impressive opinions of his own importance, Robert had not so much as listened to the others. By way of burning incense to himself, and to employ

his time agreeably, he had lighted a cheroot. This he languidly puffed, as one beyond the touch of common men. For the rest of it, he might have been an example of wearied abstraction for the wordless, moveless Ironjacket himself.

This attitude of a nobility traveling incognito—which, by the way, invariably flies the flag of an arrogant patricianism, lest that incognito it pretends to be accepted, and its noble identity be vulgarly overlooked—might have been maintained unbroken to the end, had it not been for the younger man referred to as busy about the ponies.

While the Professor and Jeff were still engaged, that individual of the ponies loafed slowly up, and took position under one of the cottonwoods. His air of unconcern was quite the blood brother of that of either Ironjacket or Robert. The latter, however, was moved to some slight interest in the young man of the ponies. It took the form of a request, or rather—if phrasing is to guide—a demand for information.

The young man of the ponies, under his selected cottonwood, stood in conversational throw of Robert. The idea striking him, the latter, with an ineffable suggestion of the social distance that separated them, broke into speech.

"See here, my man," he said, snapping thumb and finger to attract attention; "how far should you say it was to Captain Ruggles' ranch?"

There was enough in the manner to explode the irate powder in the composition of most folk. It exploded none in that of the young man of the ponies. Not that he ignored the commanding Robert. On

the contrary he raised his eyes, and looked squarely into those of his interrogator. Beyond this unblinking look, however, he offered no retort. There he stood and stared; and under the uncanny sparkle of those gray eyes, alive with a cold fire like the arctic flame of a diamond, Robert paled and flushed and paled again, while his forehead broke into little pinpoints of sweat. What was it that changed his heart to water in his breast? He tried to get a grip on his nerves, and return that gray stare. He failed; his whole nature broke and gave way in utter rout before the battery of those eyes. At that, there was nothing of threat, nothing of challenge in them; they exhibited neither a sense of injury nor surprise. There was no reproof, no anger; naught save that remorseless, inscrutable stare.

Something terribly elemental must have dwelt in those strange eyes—something of the irresistible-invincible. They owned a force which was neither to be refuted nor returned—like the frown of a mountain, the downpour of a cataract, the sweep of a storm. They belonged with the soul of domination—the spirit of conquest. Without evasion as without defiance, they seemed founded on themselves, and spoke of a will that made and enforced its own laws. The incident was over and by in a moment; and yet it left not alone Robert but the others as much tossed about as though a tornado had smote upon them.

Not the least sinister sign was the deferent, subjected attitude of the theretofore ebullient Jeff. Throughout that gray bombardment of Robert he stood tongue-tied.

Abruptly the young man of the ponies wheeled on his heel and strode away toward the river. With that Jeff, drawing a breath, began to find words.

"Colonel," he said, addressing Robert in commingled congratulation and reproach, "I don't know where you learned your manners, or who brought you up; but permit a gent who's old enough to be your father to warn you not to do that ag'in." Jeff shook his grizzled head as though he had witnessed the passing of a miracle. "I reckon now it was these yere ladies bein' present let you out. I've knowed him, two years back on the Pecos, to throw a bowie plumb through a Mexican for half as much."

"I intended no offense," stammered Robert, as much shaken as though a ghost had gripped him.

"All the same"—and Jeff began to recover his old happy vigor—"mind you: Don't do it ag'in! I begin to guess who you-all are. You're the party who's bought the Bar-Z ranch. Very well; the moment you turn the next p'int of rocks"—Jeff indicated a near-by tongue of land to the west, just across the grassy, wooded expanse—"you'll make out the Ruggles' home-camp not a mile away. But,"—here Jeff held up his hand as though to again invoke an emphasis—"yereafter, at least while you stays on the Canadian, don't run no more blazers, nor put up no more bluffs. I mean this, as much as though I told you not to feel in the mouths of no bob-cats, nor go braidin' the tails of no mules. You squeaked through this trip; don't freight over the same trail ag'in."

"Who is he?" asked the Professor, pointing to the young man of the ponies, who now stood gazing out

across the wide Canadian. Professor Doremus, like Robert, had been held spellbound by those indomitable gray eyes. Unlike Robert, however, his manhood had kept its feet. "Who is he?" he again asked.

"Who is he?" repeated Jeff, in open-mouthed wonder at the question. "Who is he? Why, man! he's Old Tom Moonlight!"

## CHAPTER III

### OLD ALAN GORDON'S WILL

THERE had been a Gordon in the Maryland county of Somerset since as far away as Cromwell's time. Hector Gordon, being the first of the name to come to Maryland, had commanded a regiment in the cause of that Charles Stewart who, one wintry Whitehall day, gave up his crown to the commons and his head to block and axe, and for whom first and last more good true English blood went flowing than should have served to save the nation against a foreign enemy.

When his king was dead, and the young prince who should have succeeded him had fled from the truculent roundheads, Hector Gordon, seeing the cause he fought for cast away, put up his sword, and rather than live under the rule of those whose hands were stained with the purple blood of his king, took ship for America. He did not come empty of purse, and his gold, whereof his prudence had saved a considerable store, even through that rough, uncertain season of civil war, was laid out in a broad estate on the shores of the Chesapeake. There he reared a stately mansion; and there he and his good dame held sway until their deaths. They raised unto themselves children in this new land; and so, after them, up-

holding their name and the ancient credit of the family they had founded, came a noble procession of Gordons, all living in the old mansion, and each in his turn the great looked-up-to figure of the county of Somersct.

Alan Gordon, being that "Uncle Gordon" so splenetically adverted to by Robert Blainey, was the last of the line—the last leaf on the old tree. There had been but one child born to him, a boy, and his wife —a dove-eyed girl she was, when Alan Gordon led her to church as his bride—died in bringing him into the world.

This Alan Gordon was an iron man. Stern, silent, high, he was no one to have sole care of a child. And what would have been bad at best was made worse, since the son, to whose upbringing he now turned, was as high and unconquerable as himself.

They lived alone, these two, save for a cloud of black servitors; for the elder Alan, brotherless from his birth, had been estranged from his two sisters even before he, himself, was married.

These sisters, so Alan held, had lowered the Gordon name. Each, in the esteem of their brother, whose family pride was as high and steep as the Scotch mountains among which the Gordons had had their source, had gone below her caste in selecting a husband. These husbands were struggling folk of much vulgar inconsequence; one was a merchant, the other an attorney; both died without a dollar, debt-eaten to the core. The only difference between them, as remarked by their haughty brother-in-law, was, that whereas the merchant Hempstead died

childless, the attorney Blainey, less considerate, left behind him a son.

Alan Gordon, his two offensive brothers-in-law being dead, did the best he could; that is to say, he amply provided for his sisters' support, but refused either to see or hold communication with them. The money ordained for their care was put in their hands by his agent, and the two were warned that if either set foot in Somerset the provision, in the case of the offending one, should come sharply to an end. They had disgraced the Gordons; he would not condone their more than fault. He would see that they did not want; beyond that he would not go. All he asked in requital of his brotherly care, was that they and theirs should never darken his Somerset doors.

The sisters, being both Gordons and of tempers more than half a match for Alan Gordon's own, received this in the dour spirit wherein it was pronounced. They would take his money; since with the last of it that money was Gordon money, and morally as much their gold as his. Beyond that they would be quite as stiff-necked as their brother. He might rest sure that both he and his doors of Somerset should never see them.

Thus lay the quarrel, when one day the mother of Robert Blainey, then a lad of eleven, died and joined her husband, the attorney, in the land beyond. The iron Alan never went to the funeral, and took no notice of his sister's death, beyond ordering her half yearly sum to be paid thereafter into the fingers of Aunt Tilda.

When his mother was put in the grave, Aunt Tilda

took home with her the orphaned Robert. Young Robert made a third in the little family group at Aunt Tilda's Baltimore cottage; for pretty Ethel Pryce, a child just learning to walk and talk, was already installed as a member. The little Ethel, like young Robert himself, had been a death-bed gift from one doubly dear to her as her husband's only sister, and again as her own girl-chum at school. Aunt Tilda's heart and house opened at once to baby Ethel, when, with her mother's going, the little one stretched out her lonely baby hands to her.

It was good for Aunt Tilda to have these children, Robert and Ethel, come to her; she had none of her own, and her starved heart went out to meet them with a mother's tenderness and love. Meanwhile, the iron Alan Gordon down in Somerset ignored them every one; and beyond those half-yearly remittances —they were roundly fat, as became a Gordon who would do things like a nobleman—gave never the sign that he so much as knew they lived. He turned his stiff, patrician back on them, and set himself wholly to the congenial task of bringing up his son Alan in the way he would not go.

The education of the boy Alan was not unmarked of vicissitudes. He showed in no wise pliant to his father's will; their relations were not so smooth and rippleless as is a mirror. The struggle between father and son began when the latter was six years old. It continued without truce until the end. There could be no talk of concord, no chance of the pair living in agreement. The father, as a calling most genteel, was for having the boy educated to

the pulpit. According to his awful notions of what constituted a Christian, Alan the elder never doubted the sincerity of his own religious professions. To his mind he was as true a follower of the meek and lowly Nazarene as any to be found in Lord Baltimore's old domain. He felt himself to be representative of every Christian virtue, and would have been scandalized to the quick had any one, high enough to be accounted the peer of a Gordon, so much as intimated that he, Alan Gordon, was not a headland on the coast of existence by which careful, pious folk, heavenward bound, might safely steer.

Being thus full of piety, and churchly to the pure core of him, Alan Gordon set his heart on making his son a clergyman. To this high end he filled up the house with deeply religious tutors, and the bookshelves with deeply religious books, and between these two, as the upper and the nether millstones of his sacred purpose, set about grinding the boy Alan into, as it were, a flour of much theological fineness.

The son Alan resisted; he stormed, wept, rebelled, stood doggedly but unchangeably sullen in the teeth of paternal command, and in all ways and on all occasions refused to be cast into the hopper of his father's pious purposes, to be presently ground and bolted and sacked ecclesiastically as aforesaid. It was in vain the father punished, argued, or commanded; he had met with metal as hard as was his own and found his son as iron as himself. The boy Alan was a brisk marvel with his books at that, and learned all and more than his tutors could teach. Studies aside, however, his reading ran away to pi-

rates, not priests, and he cared more for Morgan and Blackbeard and England, than for all the saints that were ever pictured with a halo.

It makes too long a tale, this battle between father and son. Suffice it that the latter would shoot and ride and sail and hunt and fish, and live whole weeks on the water or in the woods. As against this he refused the churchly lesson; and if pressed would hurl good Christian tomes at his tutors' heads, declaring war upon them and every pulpit thing for which they stood. Thus, for those eight years that fell in between young Alan's sixth and fourteenth birthdays, father and son, both iron, both will-rooted as Gibraltar, stood foot to foot, knee to knee, breast to breast, and gave each other battle without halt.

One day the elder Alan, as the pair with honors even concluded a verbal skirmish of more than usual fervor, said to his son:

"Sir; you are a degenerate—a 'throwback.' You are a congenital savage! Civilization, with its refinement, is lost and thrown away upon you. Here, I'll read you what you are; I shall take it from the life-story of one who three centuries ago was your ancestor. Observe: This, while it gives you some picture of how that savage Gordon lived and died, will also furnish a likeness of what in your tastes and instincts, ay! in each uttermost expression of your nature, you yourself are."

The elder Alan took up a book, evidently in part a history of his house of Gordon, and began to read:

" 'This put an end to the fray, for all of the Gordons fled down the hillside—all save one, a man of powerful form and ferocious

aspect, who was naked to the waist and had his kilt girdled about him by a belt of untanned bull's-hide. This Celtic savage, whose name was Alan Gordon, flung himself upon the nearest of his foes and forced him to the grass. He seized the prostrate man by the throat with his teeth; then stretching out his hands, maintaining the while his wolf-grip on the other's throat, he grasped Greumoch by the right foot and endeavored to drag him down by the side of the first. Greumoch strove vainly to release himself. His pistol was empty, but he struck the savage again and again on the head with the steel butt. He might with as much good effect have hammered upon a hillside stone. In the end, Greumoch tore himself free, and, snatching a claymore from one of his followers, closed in, and thrust the blade through and through the Gordon, where he still lay, wolf-fastened to the throat of his enemy. As the claymore passed through his huge body, he turned with a cry of rage on Greumoch, and writhing himself forward on the steel made a terrible effort to get his executioner within his grasp. His work was vain; suddenly with a fearful yell, rather of defeat than agony, he rolled himself free of the blade that had transfixed him, and died—biting the heather, wallowing in gore. It is from this wild man—for so he was—that the Gordons of Somerset, by direct strain, take their descent.'

"There!" cried the father, closing the book and eyeing his obstinate heir, "I have read you what the first of our race was like. I now tell you, that you, the last of our race, are in every native trait one and the savage same with him. Extremes have met, the circle is complete, and you, sir, the last hope of my family, are a degenerate and a throwback—a throwback to that white savage clad in skins. Sir, I can foresee in part your future for you. I cannot say what criminally disgraceful deed you'll do; but crime you'll commit, wrong and evil you'll perpetrate, infamy you'll bring down upon the name of Gordon." The elder Alan wrung his hands, for he believed every word he uttered. "Conquering the feelings

of a father," he said in conclusion, and not without a nearest approach to emotion that he ever made, "I could wish you lying dead to-night, rather than that you should grow up to drag the name of Gordon in the mire of your misdeeds." The elder Alan rose and left the room, leaving the younger Alan very white, but as hard and as dry-eyed as in the beginning.

The next morning there was much calling, and no replying, throughout the halls of the Somerset Gordons; for young Alan had left his father's house in the night. And no one knew his course of flight. Neither, in the long years that followed, did sign or sound of him float backward to his father, who, from the hour of his son's disappearance, was a changed and broken man.

Forgetting all, forgiving all, Alan Gordon sent for Aunt Tilda. She came—good soul!—and till his death kept his house, and was sister, mother, nurse to him. Robert and little Ethel came with her; and the elder Alan—being now, with his own son fled, the only Alan—was pitifully glad to see them. He grew old in a day, and became gray, and bent, and went doddering about on a cane while his years were yet among the forties. He never spoke of his son, nor named him; and if he made aught of effort to track him out, none knew.

Alan Gordon died, and left a curious will. And yet, rightly looked at, it was not curious. Twenty thousand dollars in flat cash were given to Robert; while to Aunt Tilda and her foster-child Ethel, the dying Gordon gave each two thousand dollars a year,

to be a charge upon his estate and payable every New Year's day. The residue—lands and houses, stocks, mortgages and moneys—the aggregate value whereof touched roundly a half million, was tied up, principal and income, for a period of ten years. If the young Alan came back within that space, it was all and singly to become his. Upon his failure thus to return, the nephew Robert was to take all in the prodigal's stead. Pending those waiting ten years, no one was to dwell in the Gordon mansion. It was to be held in the care of trustees; Aunt Tilda, Robert, and Ethel—now ripened and rounded into beautiful girlhood—were to occupy a near-by cottage, leaving the great house tenantless and ready for the wandering Alan to have instant possession of as its master.

Robert Blainey, not yet thirty, was sickly, melancholy, selfish, cruel without courage, full of book-cleverness, with a bent for plot and intrigue, and an innate preference for profit based on wrong. There was something repellant in his sallow skin, thin querulous lips, lank black hair, and small, dark complaining eyes. No one liked him; and when, taking his Uncle Gordon's will in dudgeon he set up a wail against it, saying it was hard and unfair that he should be thus put aside in favor of one who, if living, was certain to bring with him as he came into his fortune a name soiled and disfigured by a past given over to evil courses, no one to his wonder appeared to sympathize. On the contrary he met cold looks, and scarcely disguised contempt. He was never a favorite in old Somerset; now,

when he might become the Gordon heir, it was as though the countryside had combined to loathe him.

"One would think, Aunt Tilda," said he, "that I, in order to supplant him and steal his heritage, had contrived the long-ago flight of this Alan, and was now intriguing to prevent his return."

The good folk of Somerset had one advantage over and beyond any enjoyed by Robert and Aunt Tilda. The Somerset good people knew the runaway Alan; they had been acquainted with him as a lad, and numbered themselves his friends. To set opposite this, neither Robert nor Aunt Tilda nor Ethel had ever been given a glimpse of him. It was young Alan's flight that had broken down the barriers of his father's pride, and brought the latter and Aunt Tilda together. Before that day, young Alan heard but little of his Baltimore relatives, and saw them not at all. Love—affection—never exists without acquaintance, any more than your blossom exists without its root; and it would not be fair to find fault with Robert and the feminine two for taking calmly the absence of young Alan Gordon. At the most he was but a name; besides—and this is said for the good of Robert—where is he who will hunt up a lost rival, the coming of whom is to chouse him out of an inheritance?

Disliking Robert, however, and loving or thinking they loved young Alan, the good Somerset folk—all neighbors in his day of the proud Alan Gordon just passed--consented to nothing in Robert's favor. He had been passively hateful while his uncle lived, he

was actively hateful now when his uncle was dead and he a probable heir.

One's sensibilities are safer in a city. The bustle and rush of the crowd are a kind of defense. If, being city-surrounded, you are disapproved of or disliked, he who entertains the feeling, would he bring it home, must, so to speak, detain you by the elbow and tell you of it. He must say it in words or express it by overt actions; for the town-hubbub of the herd defeats an inference or a deduction from premises more passive and less gross.

In country regions the rule goes the other way about. There folk are sparsely sown. There likewise, in a paucity of more reasonable amusements, gossip protected by precedent is made to take the place of reputable entertainment. Every one knows everybody by his or her first name, and your farthest neighbor can tell more of you and your affairs than even you, yourself, might relate. It is under such familiar, close conditions that personal criticism, in its annoying possibilities, is lifted to the plane of art. Your disrepute, if it exists, becomes parcel of the very atmosphere. You taste it, feel it, smell it, see it, hear it; and that, too, without word or look or gesture on the parts of those who convey to you the information.

Thus was it in rural Somerset; and thus did Robert Blainey discover his own bad standing, and the low esteem in which, communally, he was held. Here was a thorn he had not counted on. Robert owned enough of pride to make the situation gall and wormwood to him. The fact that he himself had

had some original hand in the brewing thereof, rendered it none the less bitter to his taste.

During those dozen or more years in which Robert lived at the Gordon mansion, he had played the young lordling to the hilts. Weakened and shattered by the disappearance of his son, old Alan Gordon went seeking sympathy, dumbly, from all about him. This reaching out for support led him into an attitude of affection, almost childish, toward Robert; on this, the latter, being imaginative in a bilious selfish way, had builded many an air-castle. It spelled heirship to him, and on it his mean nature was nourished as on the milk of lions. It gave him courage to be insolent, strength to strut, and filled him to the brim with the vanity—usual in the instance of your promoted vulgarian—that transacts itself at the expense of other men.

Some natures are nobly proud; also such natures nobly pay the bills which their prides contract. This was not the case with Robert, in whom nothing of nobleness abode. With him, authority meant tyranny and pride was the synonym of oppression. Brought face to face with power, that is danger, he would have fawned, and cringed, and been a sycophant for safety's sake. By the same token, passing his youth and young manhood on a peak—the peak of the Somerset Gordons—and far above and beyond the reach of any local social artillery, he waxed supercilious, contemptuous; while his manners, if they may be called manners, smelled of the essence of insult.

Nor was Robert more wise or guarded in his utter-

ances. Often he gave the country folk a glimpse of those air-castles, and he had been prone to boast himself as the decreed heir of old Alan Gordon. He would speak of his uncle's will as of a document he had read, and had had some consulting hand in making. Then, coarsely anticipating old Alan's death, he expatiated on what should be his conduct when he might write himself master of the great white Gordon mansion buried among its trees.

The will of old Alan Gordon was to Robert both a surprise and a blow. For one disconcerting thing, it gave the lie direct to those heirship boasts of which he had been so foolishly profuse. To be ousted from the Gordon mansion, was of itself like being stripped of some star and garter of nobility. The cottage into which Aunt Tilda and Ethel and he had removed became a visible sign of his fallen estate.

Not only did Robert keenly realize these grinding truths, but the good Somerset folk, lest in some blindness of a fatuous self-conceit he overlook them, were wont to remind him of them in countless ingenious ways. Once, in speaking of what he would do when he came into his fortune as the heir of old Alan, and was the unbridled lord of the Gordon mansion, he had said that, abandoning Blainey, he should change his name to Gordon. This was recalled by ones with talents for irritation; and many were the inquiries, put with a sober slyness that baffled reprisal, as to whether or no now his uncle was dead he desired to be addressed as "Mr. Gordon." In every fashion was he made to feel the general jeer, and this went on until—always melancholy—he be-

came morbid. Aunt Tilda and Ethel heard naught and knew less of this bed of nettles whereon the unfortunate Robert lay stretched. As he was hated and despised, so were they respected and loved; and, while he lived in the shadow, they dwelt in the neighborhood sun.

Finally, those sharply disagreeable surroundings spurred Robert to a desperate leap. He made up his mind to abandon Somerset. In coming to this mighty decision, there were certain reasons, not included among those which had their roots in the ill-will of those Somerset good people, that had no little weight with him. The lost Alan might still be somewhere upon the earth. He might even seek to establish communication with Somerset. Now a letter to his father, and his father dead, would infallibly fall into the honest hands of Aunt Tilda. Such a ruinous contingency must be fended against. It would be the part of cautious wisdom, if the step might be managed, to carry Aunt Tilda as far from Somerset, and from Maryland itself, as she would go —so far, indeed, as to fairly cut off communication with the old home. Having achieved such isolation, he must contrive to maintain it throughout those ten waiting years. Then young Alan's letter, should he send one, would not be replied to, and the silence thus arranged would prevent—so Robert hoped—his return. Thus did he consider and connive; and those plans he was thereby moved to build were pleasant to him, becoming as manna that melted on the lips of his native genius for intrigue.

There arose a second argument, almost as cogent

with Robert as was the one just rehearsed, an argument which should meet perhaps with a more tolerant sympathy. In a shifty secret fashion, concealing it as though disclosure meant shame, he was in love with Ethel.

There was nothing nobly creditable in this love, albeit it might be pointed to as that sentiment least discreditable to which his narrow breast gave refuge. It was not the love of an aggressive masculinity, deep-chested and commanding, that seizes without question put, and upon which the feminine refusal is wasted and of no effect, since there was not enough to be stark and manly in his fiber for such love to feed upon. A coward—speaking of the male—is never a lover in that larger sense required of the rôle; and Robert was a coward. It may be taken as one of love's truisms that he who cannot face a man, can still less face a woman. Also, a woman before she can love must look up; and it is woman's nature to look up only to courage.

With these, the laws of love, Robert, as a mere result of instinct, felt himself defeated in his hopes of Ethel before he had made a first advance. Ethel, warm in her womanhood, and woman to the heart, could not love down, but must love up; how, then, was he to have her?—he who was so wholly her inferior! This was the query which his instinct put, and shrunk from having answered.

Incapable of the positive and the direct, Robert had never told his love to Ethel. His poor confidence had never risen even to the little heights of hinting it. The best he might do was fall to plot-

ting, just as a rat might fall to gnawing; and with that it came to him as a thought—as in the instance of Aunt Tilda, where the motive was fear instead of love—to carry her primarily from out the midst of men. He was just male enough to understand in every other male of his tribe a rival; thus far his nature ran true. Proceeding, therefore, one step at a time, as the weak ever slowly must, it would be in the direction of final triumph, to divorce her as much as might be from every masculine influence other than his own.

With these thoughts running in his head concerning both Ethel and Aunt Tilda, and to escape those acrid Somerset conditions which hedged him round like fire, Robert turned his scheming eyes to the wilderness of the far Southwest, as offering those lonesome advantages whereof he was in search. There were his twenty thousand dollars! He would invest in cattle. To what better opportunity could his limited fortune be addressed? In ten years, by all he could learn, those twenty thousand dollars, planted in a ranch, would bring forth a tenfold harvest. He could return to Somerset rich in his own right, and add the new wealth he had gathered to that wealth which would then be his by Alan Gordon's will. He would take possession of the Gordon mansion, and set up lord in earnest. Also, he must have his hour of vengeance upon those sneering ones.

The longer Robert dwelt upon that programme of emigration and investment, the better he liked it. He had heard of two birds and one stone; this would be a triple killing. It would give him the woman he

loved; it would reduce to minimum the chance of young Alan's return; it would pour down golden profits on those twenty thousand dollars. Aside from these, it would presently take him out of a Somerset environment that was as a garment of thorns.

Having made his plan and arranged his reasons to support it, Robert laid the proposition before Aunt Tilda. He was, he said, young, idle, without a profession; he was pressed upon by the propriety of doing something. The Southwest offered a most hopeful field.

"Give me your judgment, now," said he. "At the same time"—here he bent a filial eye upon Aunt Tilda—"you must not forget, dear Aunt, that I shall engage in nothing, go nowhere, that separates me from you and Ethel. Do not counsel me to take the step which I've outlined, unless you are willing to go with me. I shall need your care; I tell you frankly that no argument of money-profit could for one moment reconcile me to the loss of it. Go or stay, it is settled that I must be with you and Ethel."

At this fine passage, Robert was so much a master of policy as to kiss Aunt Tilda; and he managed the caress quite knowingly. The worthy lady, thus approached, was obviously touched. A woman as a rule likes to think herself indispensable, and Aunt Tilda was no exception. Besides, Robert had come at her on her motherly side, where the defenses were weakest. She was both flattered and melted; and while it cost her an effort, and filled her with misgivings, she bravely and at once agreed that his design

seemed one of solvent wisdom, and promised to accompany him wherever he should go.

Aunt Tilda was the more satisfied; for she had long harbored a wish that Robert would apply himself in some vigorous, manly direction. She believed in work, Aunt Tilda did, as she believed in the current of a brook, and held it to be a purification. Idleness, and whether one were pressed by money-need or no was no other nor better than just so much stagnant disgrace. Her respect for Robert took on weight, when now he turned ambitious to be no more a drone.

Aunt Tilda re-told the talk with Robert to Ethel; and because it pleased Aunt Tilda—this plan of emigration—it pleased Ethel. With this for the start, details were soon arranged, and within two months thereafter the trio found themselves in Galveston.

It has been ever easy to buy a cattle ranch in Texas; in good truth it has been ever easier to buy than to sell one. Within a fortnight after he stepped ashore Robert, counseled somewhat by Aunt Tilda and the Professor, had become the proprietor of the Bar-Z outfit, with ranges on the upper Canadian. It was only a small outfit, as brands and ranches go, with perhaps a thousand head of cattle, and what ponies were required to "work" them. Still one may not make himself cattle-master of a hundred herds, with twenty thousand dollars. Our investor took enough for his money, and was fortunate to fare so well.

## CHAPTER IV

### IRONJACKET'S LOST MEDICINE

For ten minutes after the lodge of Ironjacket had been left behind, silence prevailed among those in the surrey. This may have been due to the break-neck gait which, under Cato's urging, the mules maintained. The pitching of the light vehicle among the ruts was not conducive to conversation. Cato's original fears had been in no wise mollified by the stop, and he went cracking his thong along the backs of his cattle as though some wide-mouthed peril pursued. At last Professor Doremus put out a cautionary hand.

"Not so fast," he cried, "not so fast, Cato. We've left the wagons far behind."

Cato retired his lash from circulation and glanced nervously over his shoulder. The thin pencil of smoke among the cottonwoods, that marked the camp-fire of Ironjacket, was half a mile astern, and Cato drew a long breath.

"I s'ppose it's d' way I'm made, Professah," he began apologetically; "but all d' time we was idlin' about dem Injuns, I expec's every minute's goin' to be our nex'. It jes' sets me, once we does get started, to pourin' d' leather into d' mules."

"Old Tom Moonlight!" repeated Professor Doremus. The mules had been subdued to a walk, and

he was speaking now to Aunt Tilda and Robert. "Truly, an odd prefix for one who, obviously, has not seen thirty years."

"Not so odd as his manner," fumed Robert. "Had he been a gentleman, I might have called him to book."

Robert was fed upon by that anger which weak men feel toward themselves, when a peril they failed to face has passed by. His brow was hot and red. With those hard, gray eyes a half mile away, he really and for the moment felt capable of bitter deeds.

"That look of insult the fellow cast upon me," Robert went on, "would have merited attention, had he been of my station."

Professor Doremus coughed in a queer way.

"There arose naught to indicate that this Mr. Moonlight was not a gentleman." The remark, in its inflection, took the upward twist of criticism. Plainly, Robert's ready dismissal of the cool Moonlight, as one beneath his haughty notice, did not invoke the approval of the Professor. "For myself, I make it a rule to presume every man a gentleman until the contrary is shown."

"Then," observed Robert, growing hotter and redder, "you would have demanded an explanation."

"Why, sir, I think I should." The Professor had become quite stiff and ramrod like. "The attitude of this Mr. Moonlight was not explainable save on a theory of contumely. And, while I realize"—here the Professor stroked his thin locks—"that I am come of a day when men were not nice in these

matters, I hold it to be better to fight ignorantly with yokels rather than let one gentleman escape."

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed Aunt Tilda; "you surely would not counsel Robert to a duel, Professor!"

Aunt Tilda had not followed the talk closely, being plunged in thoughts concerning the savage housekeeping of Madam Southwind, with her one-room skin tent, and her kitchen the ground beneath a sheltering tree. She was wondering how a Kiowa wife managed to fry or boil, or in truth do any culinary thing save roast, when the hardy tenor of Professor Doremus' observations attracted her.

"Assuredly, my dear Madam," said the Professor, with a deep bow, "I would counsel no one to so serious a step. I spoke only of what, under certain conditions, should be my own course."

"And do you defend the barbarism of dueling?" Aunt Tilda was shocked.

"I do not defend, I simply accept the barbarism of which you speak, precisely as I accept every other barbarism of my time and place. Also, one must uphold his honor; that is not for one moment to be denied."

"Honor!" repeated Aunt Tilda. She had begun to recall, how, when the world was young with both of them, the thin, suave Professor had had fame as a fire-eater of most sensitively truculent fiber. This served to abate astonishment at her old friend's bristling views, while in no sort diminishing her condemnation. "I do not understand," she continued, "how one's honor can be put in question by a mere stranger who sees fit to be rude. Like Robert, I think the young man beneath notice. Although,

doubtless"—Aunt Tilda feared to be unjust—"his wild surroundings, and want of opportunity, are to blame for his boorishness."

Here befell the unexpected. Ethel had been holding Jet close to the surrey's wheel. She now claimed her part.

"There was no boorishness, dear aunt!" cried Ethel. Her manner was wondrous passionate. "He held us in contempt; that was all. I could see it while he glared at Robert; I felt it when he turned away."

Like Robert, Ethel was angry with herself. She, too, had felt the spell of those gray eyes; and she resented it. They had not alarmed her, as they alarmed Robert; worse, they had fascinated her. For the first time in her young life there had come a man who made the pretty Ethel think twice of him. This ruffled her spirit; to her girl's instincts it seemed to speak of weakness, and rendered her impatient and uneasy.

"There was no impression of the boor about him," she continued. Her tone was lower now. "His face was high and noble, and he carried an atmosphere of command." Then, with a sudden, angry pointlessness, wholly diagonal and feminine, she wheeled upon Robert: "I wonder you did not strike him!"

Robert's look grew black enough. Vaguely he felt that he had lost place with Ethel, as he had with the Professor. As vaguely, yet no less surely, he knew that she was, even then, mentally comparing him with the stranger, to his, Robert's disadvantage. This set his jealousy afire, and gave his hate a double

reason. He would have replied, but could fashion nothing to help his case. While he paused, wordless, the Professor again spoke up.

"I would not offend," said he, "but, as Miss Ethel has said, this Mr. Moonlight owned every mark above the common. Mr. Horne himself spoke of him as though he dealt with a demigod. Really, my dear Madam, I do not think that any gentleman, having in view his own honor, could safely overlook an insult at his hands."

Professor Doremus cast upon Aunt Tilda a respectful but still a firmly warlike eye, as though concerning this topic of ticklish honor he would combat even her.

Beholding which, and privily approving, she smiled back upon him a smile of pleased submission. A woman likes deference in a man, but she does not want him to surrender to her. She will now and then confute him, and give him battle, but she does not desire to defeat him. Indeed, victory embarrasses a true woman; she knows not what to do with triumph. She is not looking so much for conquest as for protection, when she marches forth to meet a man, and she will forgive in him anything, everything, except being weaker than herself. When, therefore, her ancient admirer stood stubbornly, even against her revered word, in defense of that primal manly franchise to war with other and contumelious members of his sex, Aunt Tilda could not repress an amiable ray. Moreover, the word "Honor," as it fell from the Professor—for she had not read her ballads for nothing—recalled old Lovelace:

"I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honor more."

It would be difficult to say into just what concessions Aunt Tilda was upon the brink of being betrayed, concessions which, added to the stiff pose of the Professor and the resentful sparkle of Ethel, would have weighed crushingly upon Robert, if a new and to the latter gentleman a more interesting subject had not thrust itself upon the conversation. They were now abreast of that rocky point remarked by the obliging Jeff in his last directions, and there before them rose the mud walls of Captain Ruggles' home-ranch.

When Cato went whipping away, Jeff Horne stood watching the surrey's headlong departure with a smile.

"That darky's stampeded," said he to himself. "Now I wonder was it Ironjacket's black paint or the Cap'n's scowl!"

Jeff Horne had two titles for his companion. When he named him to others, he referred to him as "Old Tom Moonlight." To himself, or when he addressed that gentleman personally, he hailed him as "Cap'n."

Southwind looked up from the fire, and spoke a word or two in a broken jumble of Kiowa and Spanish. Thereupon Jeff lost interest in the vanishing surrey in favor of something nearer his heart and his hand. Southwind had announced her savage dinner; the antelope was roasted to a turn.

"Cap'n!" cried Jeff; "Oh Cap'n!"

Moonlight was standing where he had taken position after staring Robert hot and cold and hot again. At the call he turned his head.

"Chuck!" said Jeff.

Having thus announced the repast and done, as he would have thought, his full duty in the premises, Jeff seized upon the antelope rib which Southwind tendered, and fell to, wolfishly.

"Good conscience, good appetite!" he ruminated philosophically. "Thar's nothin' so condoocive to health, that-away, as a strickly moral life."

Moonlight was not a whit behind Jeff so far as appetite was involved, albeit he managed with less wolfishness and more delicacy.

"That gent in the surrey, Cap'n," observed Jeff, the wire-edge of his hunger worn away, "was a fool."

"He'll know more later."

The voice was full, deep, musical, and in keeping with the noble face. Ethel and the Professor were right; the most casual survey would have exempted Moonlight from any imputation of the commonplace. He was above a middle height, slim, long in the reach, with rounded chest, and wide, powerful shoulders. His hands and feet were as small as those of a dandy or an Indian. His skin, tanned almost to an aboriginal copper, showed him no newcomer to the plains. The expression of his face—to quote from Ethel—was high and noble; and yet the pronounced cheek-bones, lean, curved nose, clean angles at chin and jaw, told of the predatory. The wonder of the man lurked in those gray eyes, which danced or drew to a level stare, were soft as a woman's or hard as agate, according to their owner's mood. Over all abode dignity and domination without truculence. And, yet, given anger as an element and an enemy to be the object, one could feel a latent genius for vengeance and reprisal. One might have found an easier foe;

there was that about him which furnished, even to the thickest and most careless, a thought of the tiger asleep.

Having dined to his satisfaction, Jeff regaled himself with a huge mouthful of tobacco. Moonlight rolled and lighted a cornhusk cigarette with the dexterity of a Mexican. After a lazy puff or two he glanced at Jeff. There was a questioning slant in the glance that set Jeff talking.

"The old gent, who called himself Professor Doremus and lectured on antelopes, was clean strain. He wasn't like t'other. An' as for that lady—the one I talked with—thar's nothin' of the long horn about her. She was shore 'nough corn-fed, or I'm no judge of cattle."

Moonlight, the taciturn, blew pale, thick rings of smoke. He was thinking of the girl on the black pony; and since his thoughts ran to the effect that she was sublime in her dark, soft beauty, he did not frame them into words. His impressions of Ethel would have been wasted upon Jeff and made only a crying instance of pearls and swine.

"They're the outfit that bought the Bar-Z ranch." Jeff tossed this off lest Moonlight be behind on Panhandle gossip. "About a day's pull up the river the home-ranch is. They'll stay at old Ruggles' tonight."

Moonlight puffed on without comment.

"Frosty told me at Tascosa," continued Jeff, naming a gifted gambler of his acquaintance, "that old Ruggles was goin' to give a *baile*. It's day after to-morrow. Frosty's comin' up to turn a little monte for the Mexicans. He ought to win a *peso* or two,

Frosty had. When it gets down to kyards, he's as cunnin' as a pet fox. I wonder now what's old Ruggles' little game in givin' this fandango."

"There should be nothing strange about it," observed Moonlight, rolling a second cigarette. "Ruggles is more of a Mexican than a white man. His wife was a Mexican—a Baca. Now his daughter is to marry a Baca—a Don Anton Baca, from over near Chaparita. The *baile* is in honor of their betrothal."

"Not your Don Anton Baca?"

Jeff had pricked up his ears at the name.

"You've guessed it. It was his peoñs who tore my buffalo camp to pieces last fall, and cut and slashed two hundred robes for me."

"An' then left a moccasin behind," jeered Jeff in vast contempt for the stratagem, "to make you think they was Injuns."

"But forgot," went on Moonlight, "to mount their ponies from the right side, as Indians would, and so left proof as plain as a page of print that they were Mexicans. However, there's no question. I ran their trail straight to the Baca ranch on the Concha."

"Ay!"—this, with a satisfied smile—"an' cut out two hundred head of Don Anton's fattest steers, an' drove them over to the Palo Duro to make all even. Two hundred steers for two hundred robes is proper good barter. To keep it up would break all the Bacas between the Canadian an' the Rio Grande."

Silence fell for a space.

"Jeff," observed Moonlight, after a wordless two minutes, "I've a notion to attend that *baile*."

"You're the doctor, Cap'n!" returned Jeff, dubi-

ously. But you know old Ruggles ain't got much use for us buffalo hunters. He allows we kill his cattle. Besides, thar's your friend Don Anton. Don't you-all reckon, Cap'n, the young *rico* has missed them two hundred steers by now?"

"And if he has?"

"Nothin' much! Only under all them circumstances I sort o' wondered if your cuttin' in on old Ruggles' *baile* might not lead up to a war."

Moonlight smiled carelessly.

"The smoke would have to be thick, *amigo,* to keep me from seeing my way through." Then rousing himself with a manner of decision: "However, it's settled; I'll be at that betrothal dance of the Senorita Inez. Also, I shall want my best horse. Catch up your pony and ride over to the Palo Duro; a good road gait should bring you there by midnight, and you'll have a moon. Meet me here to-morrow night, and bring President with you."

"President?"

"Yes, President; I've an impression that I shall open the Mexican eyes before we're through, and to do it I'll need the four swiftest hoofs in the Panhandle."

"An' Red River Bill?—he'll shore want to come!"

"I've never felt the worse for having Red River about. But you'd better call up your pony, and pull out; it's quite a scramble to the Palo Duro, and you'll need all the time."

"An' you?"

"I'll camp here with Ironjacket; I want to talk with our painted friend."

"You couldn't get a word out o' him, Cap'n, now

he's lost his medicine bag, an' got himself disgraced that-away — no, not if you was to bend your six-shooter over his head."

Jeff, who was learned as to Kiowas, spoke with confidence. Moonlight, with quite as much wisdom touching Kiowas, replied with equal confidence.

"Never fear; I'll find a way to make him talk."

Moonlight's confidence was better grounded than was that of Jeff's. He knew what he was going to talk about, and Jeff did not.

It was a forty-mile run from the Canadian to the Palo Duro, and Jeff, who loved his ease, sighed woefully as he swung into the saddle. None the less he did not hesitate, for the word of Moonlight was his law. With a dig of his spurs, and a farewell "How!" to Southwind and her blooming daughter, he cantered off among the cottonwoods toward the south.

When Jeff had departed, Moonlight cast loose the cinches, and drawing the saddle from his already hobbled pony, threw it on the grass by the camp fire. Rummaging in one of the war-bags he took out a sizable bundle, ambiguous in character, but as nearly as one might guess in the twilight now gathering beneath the thick-boughed trees, the skin of some animal rolled tight. With this in his hands he approached the mournful Ironjacket, still rigid and moveless as a statue.

"How fares it with my father?"

Moonlight's words were gravely sympathetic. Ironjacket never gave a sign; the query gained not the quiver of an eyelash in reply. It was as though Moonlight had spoken to a tree. The latter went on neither astonished nor hurt.

"I come," said he, "to lift shame from my father's shoulders, and wash the black from his face and the sorrow from his heart. Does my father see?"

Moonlight undid the mysterious roll and threw it at the feet of Ironjacket. It was a pouch made from the whole skin of a beaver, with claws and teeth and tail retained.

Ironjacket's broad breast began to heave. What Moonlight had tossed down before him was as the heaven and the earth to him, but, beyond that straining bosom and the fire gathering in his eye, he controlled himself.

"It is the lost medicine of Ironjacket!" he whispered, drawing the beaverskin pouch toward him in a mystified way. "The medicine of Ironjacket has come back!"

Casting off the ragged blanket, he sprang to his feet, and sent a yell, that was as a proclamation of self-respect, reverberating among the hills which fenced about the cottonwood grove. It was not defiant, not joyful, that yell. It was simply the reassertion of his savage manhood, and notice to the world that Ironjacket had once more taken to himself the high place that was his in the ranks of the Kiowas.

## CHAPTER V

### THE STORY OF THE STEEL SHIRT

IRONJACKET stood for a moment as straight as a pine —nostril working, eye burning with pride. Then he wheeled on his heel and stalked into his lodge.

Moonlight rolled a fresh cigarette as though he were alone. The Kiowa, in his native eccentricities, was no new tale to him, and he waited the return of Ironjacket without remark. Repose is the foundation of dignity with a savage, and Moonlight when he dealt with Indians became as one of them. Besides it was not his "medicine" that had been lost and was now returned; his good repute had not just been lifted from the mire. It was easy for him to be cool, and preserve a steady gravity of manner.

Southwind and her daughter Firelight understood all that had passed, and could construe its meaning in their dusky destinies. They had glowed passively while Ironjacket was near; once he stepped within the lodge, and the restraint of his presence was withdrawn, they chirped to each other like a brace of catbirds. A squaw has no dignity to keep up. She may grow as excited as she chooses. She may wail with sorrow or laugh with delight, and her standing remain untouched. There was nothing to subdue or silence the joy of Southwind and the young Firelight.

The disgrace of the husband and father—the unspeakable shame of a man who has lost his "medicine"—had attached to them, since tribally they must rise or fall by him. They had been as outcasts; now, with the lost "medicine" restored, they might again lead Kiowa fashion on the Rabbit Ear. It was their social prospects, so splendidly repaired, that furnished the impulse of their half-hysterical, congratulatory chatter.

Ironjacket came forth from the lodge, and that gratulatory chatter sunk to whisperings and ecstatic murmurs. He himself was in gay fresh face paints —yellow, green and red. Two arrogant eagle feathers jutted skyward from the roots of his scalp-lock. His blanket was black and red. Where it fell away from his brawny throat, a silver medal showed pendent to a necklace of bear claws. Also he had pinched silver earrings into the lobes of his ears, and embellished his belt with a knife and tomahawk—steel-bright and glancing in the flare of the camp fire.

In his hand Ironjacket bore his redstone "medicine" pipe of ceremony, brought at the price of two lives from the sacred pipe-stone quarries a long twelve hundred miles to the north—quarries guarded from Kiowas by blood-hungry Sioux and Pawnees. Altogether, during those brief moments within the lodge, he had wrought a marvel in his appearance. He had gone in the tribal vagrant—ragged, painted a dejected black. He came out brilliant, prosperous and proud—a Kiowa of wealth, station and respect.

Shaking the rich blanket from his shoulders, Ironjacket spread it like a sumptuous rug on the windward side of the fire, and in Kiowa invited Moonlight

to occupy it. When they were placed, cross-legged like two tailors, he began with not a little flourish to fill the red-stone pipe. He spoke a sharp word to Southwind. That obedient woman scrambled to her feet, and a moment later planted Ironjacket's lance in the ground at the door of the lodge. On the lance she hung his war shield. The long, red plume of hawks' feathers that adorned the center of the shield tossed in the slow evening breeze, and gave notice that here a warrior lived—one capable for peace or strife, or whatever other manly thing might be demanded of him.

The pipe being filled Ironjacket lighted it with a coal of fire, and blew smoke to the sky above, the earth beneath, and lastly to the setting sun, whose red disk just showed above the western skyline. He passed the pipe to Moonlight, who returned the peaceful compliment of those three formal smoke-puffs. Ceremony being satisfied, Ironjacket reclaimed his pipe, Moonlight again betook himself to cigarettes, and the pair settled themselves to the commonplace of a tobacco-comforted evening.

After ten minutes of silent smoking, Ironjacket bent a benignant look upon Moonlight.

"I was forgotten," said Ironjacket in Kiowa, "and my son restored me; I was dead, and he has made me live. My son is a warrior—I have seen him fight. But some day he may have too many enemies. When that morning comes, my son must send for his father. Nor shall his father be far to seek. Waiting for that hour, Ironjacket swears by his 'medicine,' and by grass and water and the fire made of cedarwood, that he will never again be two days' ride from his son."

"I thank my father, and shall not forget," Moonlight answered, as he had been addressed, in Kiowa. Then, with a half indolent, half curious air, as though the business possessed but a partial interest, he asked: "Where did my father see me fight?"

"On the banks of the Beaver. It was there my son killed Sun Boy. It was a fight of knives."

"That is of another day," observed Moonlight musingly. "The buffaloes have gone north seven times since then. Sun Boy belonged with the Wolf Robe band of Kiowas; I was with the Kicking Bird." Moonlight got this off tranquilly; the memory of that homicide raised never a ripple. Dropping the filial, he continued: "I remember now; Ironjacket and Wolf Robe came to the ground with Sun Boy."

"It was to see right done," returned Ironjacket, puffing composedly. "Sun Boy was my brother's son. Moonlight and Sun Boy fought about a squaw."

"Ay! a squaw. She looked at me twice; Sun Boy grew jealous and killed her with his war axe."

"She was an idler and a gad-about," quoth Ironjacket, phlegmatically, "and tanned no buffalo robes. Also, she saw too many men with her eyes. Her name was Saucy Osage. After she died, Kiowa squaws worked good. Sun Boy did well."

"Perhaps! But I did not like it. So I killed Sun Boy with my knife."

"The fight was fair, and Moonlight is a mighty warrior; his heart and his 'medicine' are strong. Sun Boy is now dead, and Moonlight is Ironjacket's son."

As though to re-emphasize his friendship, Ironjacket again passed his pipe to Moonlight, who quali-

fied the peace between them with the usual three puffs. There came another smoky silence, which Ironjacket was the first to break.

"My son was a Kiowa when he killed Sun Boy."

"My father is right. I was a Kiowa of the band of Kicking Bird."

"Kicking Bird — *Ta-ne-on-koe*" — repeated Ironjacket, giving the Indian pronunciation. "He was always urging the Kiowas to follow the white man's trail, and do as the white man did. That was not well, Kicking Bird should have thought again. The Indian cannot do as the white man does; his hands are too small." Ironjacket held out his two hands which, like the hands of most Indians, were no bigger than a woman's. "An Indian's hands are big enough to pull a bow, or shoot a gun, or hold a lance, or stab with a knife; but they are not big enough to use a hoe or guide a plow. Kicking Bird talked wrong talk. So thought the Great Spirit; for when Kicking Bird—who would be as a white man—took a Mexican woman for his squaw, she put poison in his cup. Kicking Bird is now with Sun Boy. But he has to catch and saddle Sun Boy's pony, and carry home the deer that he kills, for Sun Boy met his death at the knife of a warrior, face to face, while Kicking Bird was poisoned like a coyote by a squaw."

Moonlight let Ironjacket dispose as he would of the heavenly fortunes of the departed Kicking Bird. Ironjacket knocked the ashes from the redstone pipe and fumbled in his pouch for more tobacco.

"My son is no longer a Kiowa. Now he is a white man, hunts buffaloes, holds cattle, and lives with other white men on the Palo Duro."

Moonlight nodded.

"My son has no squaw?"

"No."

"He shall have the Firelight."

Moonlight smiled, and pointed to the small figure of a bear, in blue ink, on the breast of Ironjacket.

"A bear cannot wed with a bear," he said. Tearing open his shirt at the throat, Moonlight displayed a little blue bear on the white skin, fellow of the one that marked the breast of Ironjacket. "It cannot be; we are both bears, and the Firelight must not be my squaw."

The young lady under discussion had already retired within the lodge in attendance upon her mother, Southwind, and Ironjacket and Moonlight were alone. The sensibilities of Firelight were thus saved.

The prompt disposal of his offer of the fair Firelight did not ruffle Ironjacket. He glanced at the totem tattooed on the breast of Moonlight, and grunted agreement.

"My son is right; bear and bear do not marry." Ironjacket puffed judgmatically: "Besides, much worry comes with a squaw. She wants always new things: one day a pony, next day a blanket. When her husband is asleep she talks with squaws as careless as herself; and while she talks the camp fire goes out."

On the back of this wisdom conversation fell prone for the space of a score of puffs at Ironjacket's redstone pipe. Moonlight had no notion of proposing a fresh subject. He was waiting for Ironjacket to talk about his beaver-skin "medicine" that had been lost and was found again. Ironjacket would come to that

in time. He could not rush to it as a topic; to do so would be in defiance of Kiowa etiquette, and militate against his dignity. Its loss had been worse than death; its return meant more than life; this Ironjacket had conceded, and would act upon throughout his life in favor of him who was the reason of his rehabilitation. But he must not too much dwell upon the incident. To do so would be the sign of a woman, and slight his manhood. Moonlight understood, and kept his patience. Ironjacket was bound in the end to recur to that subject of the "medicine" bag. An Indian has his dignity; but also he has his curiosity.

Ironjacket began finally in this casual fashion.

"My son found the lost 'medicine' of his father by Wolf Creek. It had been caught in the bough of a little tree."

"I found my father's 'medicine' by the salt lakes back of *Tulia*." Moonlight wore the same air of careless indifference that distinguished Ironjacket. "Gray Horse, the Comanche, was wearing it. He had bragged that he took it in battle."

The cords in Ironjacket's throat began to swell rancorously.

"Gray Horse lied. The Comanches ambushed us in the thick bushes by Wolf Creek. My 'medicine' was tied to my lance, and when I charged it was torn off by the branches. For one whole moon I sought it, but it was not to be found. The lying Gray Horse had picked it up. Now I shall search for this two-tongue; when I have found him he will talk no more lies."

Moonlight reached for his bridle that had been thrown on the grass by his saddle. From the bits

depended a black glossy braid of hair. This he disengaged and tossed to Ironjacket.

"There is his scalp," said he, "and my father is too late. Gray Horse ate my buffalo meat, and smoked my pipe. Then he crept in among my horses to steal; for Gray Horse was a thief as well as a liar. It was in the night; but my eye was open and my ear awake. So I shot him with my buffalo gun, and brought my father back his 'medicine.' Also, my father may keep the scalp; it will give him a good heart."

Ironjacket's black eyes snapped and blazed, as he fondled the thick braid of hair.

"I will tie it to my 'medicine,'" he said. "It shall be as a warning to liars."

After surveying for a moment the beaver-skin, which was as the outward husk of that important "medicine," Ironjacket opened it at the laced slash between the forelegs, and thrust in his hand. One by one with his searching fingers he counted over those several occult odds and ends that together made up his fetish. Nothing was missing, as one might tell by the satisfied twinkle of his eyes.

"It is good!" said he. "But yet"—he looked inquiringly at Moonlight—"how did my son know it was the 'medicine' of his father?"

"Am I not a Kiowa? Do I not know a Kiowa 'medicine' even on a thieving Comanche? Does not every Kiowa know Ironjacket? The trail to my father was neither long nor hard. I knew that he must be mourning for his loss, so I came at once. Let me ask my father: Is there nothing gone? He should feel in his beaver-skin bag again."

"All is there," reported Ironjacket, after a second and more thorough exploration. "There is nothing lost."

Moonlight held out a buckskin packet, stained with time, and whipped about with deer-sinews.

"Did my father ever see this?" he asked. "I took it from my father's 'medicine' bag, when I stripped it from the shoulders of the lying Gray Horse. Had the Comanche put it there?"

Ironjacket took the buckskin packet into his hands, and looked it over with familiar interest.

"This I have seen always," said Ironjacket. "I had it from my father; whose father had it from his father before him. It was with my 'medicine,' but it was not part of it. No"—and Ironjacket again recurred to his scrutiny of the buckskin packet—"no; this was the 'medicine' of a white face who died long ago—so long ago that this river"—tossing his hand toward the Canadian—"was young when he died."

"I have looked inside," said Moonlight. "As my father says, it is a white man's 'medicine.' It is a talking 'medicine,' and tells of the white man's God."

"My son is brave. The heart of Ironjacket is strong; and yet he would not unwrap this thing. Our wise men have said that an evil spirit has his home in it. Wait!"

Ironjacket arose and entered the lodge. Soon he returned with a short tunic or hunting-shirt, heavily bedecked with fringes and feathers. He put the garment into the hands of Moonlight. The weight amazed him; on closely examining it the mystery was laid bare. The body of the tunic was made up

of a shirt of finely linked chain mail. The steel links were brown with stain and rust, but had been kept smooth with tallow. Divested of feathers and buckskin fringes, which were an Indian addition, this steel shirt—sleeveless it was—would have reached from a tall man's throat to a point midway between hip and knee. Moonlight hefted the thing in his hand; his examination over, he bent an inquiring glance on the Kiowa.

"Listen!" said Ironjacket, in response to the glance. "It is that"—pointing to the steel tunic—"which makes the name of Ironjacket. My son shall hear. No, I wouldn't tell it to a white man; but my son is a Kiowa. This is what was told by my father, who heard it from his father. There have been many Ironjackets—so many." He held up seven fingers. "One and all they have owned this iron shirt, the father giving it to the son; and with it the 'medicine'"—pointing to the skin-wrapped packet—"of the dead white face. I am a Kiowa; my father was a Kiowa. But my father's father, and all who went before, were Missouris. The Missouris were bold men, but they are gone now. Some were killed by the Pawnees; some by the Sioux. Then the smallpox came, and only a few were left. That was many summers ago when my father's father was chief of the Missouris. Now when they were too weak to fight with the Pawnees and the Sioux, they came to their cousins the Kiowas, and there were no more Missouris. They were all Kiowas from that time."

Ironjacket paused to uplift himself with a puff from the redstone pipe.

"My son, listen! As many summers ago as there

are leaves on a large tree, the Missouris lived by the big bend where the Kaw has its mouth. One day their hunters were far out on the plains after buffaloes. Their camp was by the Pawnee Rock. While the Missouris were by the Rock, many white men came from the West; with them were their squaws and pappooses. The white men were fools. They thought the Missouris were Osages, to whom they bore a message. The captain of the white men smoked with the chief of the Missouris. When he had smoked he said: 'We come from beyond the mountains to the west. By the mouth of the Kaw, on the big bend of the Missouri, we are going to live. See, we bring our squaws, and our pappooses, and our spotted buffaloes; for we shall build a town and stay. But first we must kill all the Missouris. That is why we smoke with the Osages, who are at war with the Missouris. You and I will help one another. We will go together and kill all the Missouris. Then we who are white men shall build the town; and you and your Osages, who are our friends, shall trade with us.' This"—here Ironjacket snorted his contempt for that fatuous white man—"the paleface captain spoke to the chief of the Missouris, for the paleface captain was a fool."

"As my father says," observed Moonlight, "that white man was a fool and deserved to die."

"This was on him when he spoke," said Ironjacket, picking up the chain-mail shirt. "Also, he died, as my son has said."

There was a further moment given up to smoke and silence.

"It was this way," resumed Ironjacket. "The

chief of the Missouris said he was glad to hear the talk of the white captain, for it gave him a good heart. He would send for his young men; and after that he would show the white men where to find the Missouris. So he sent his runners for his people; and he and the white captain waited and smoked. Seven sleeps they smoked; and on the seventh day the fighting men of the Missouris had come."

"And the chief of the Missouris then told the fool white captain the truth?"

"He told him the truth," replied Ironjacket complacently. "Lance and axe and arrow never lie, and the chief spoke with arrow and lance and axe."

"Did he kill all?"

"All!—men, pappooses, squaws; he killed all. But at first one man, who was dressed like a squaw, got away on a horse. There were other horses, but the Missouris were afraid to ride them; for this was many summers ago. The Missouris would fight with a horse, for they were brave; but at that time their hearts had not grown big enough to ride on a horse's back. The Missouris chased the squaw-man; but they chased him a-foot. The chief told his young men they must kill him, or he would bring back more white men. So they followed him by his horse's tracks across Sand Creek, and Crooked Creek, and the Medicine Lodge, and the Cimarron; and they knew they would get him, for they saw by the two camps he made that he had nothing to eat. Then they found where the wolves killed his horse. And then a fire shone on a hill. That was by this river, the Canadian; and the hill was this hill by which we are now camped."

Ironjacket pointed to the huge hill that furnished the bluff termination of the point of rocks, which ran down towards the river on the eastern edge of the cottonwood grove. Its outlines stood out tall and black in the moonlight.

"And the squaw-man," asked Moonlight; "did the Missouris kill him?"

"They found him on that hill by his fire; and they killed him. He did not fight, for he was weak. Besides, he was a squaw-man, and wore the dress of a squaw. When the Missouris crept upon him he did not hear. He was talking with what is wrapped up in that buckskin—talking with his 'medicine.' The Missouris waited to see what his 'medicine' would do; but it did nothing. Then they waited no longer, and smote him with their stone clubs. No, they did not scalp him; for in his fear, being a squaw-man, he had shaved away his hair, and there was no scalp-lock. But they brought his 'medicine' to the chief of the Missouris—who was many times back my father. The medicine men of the Missouris packed it with cedar leaves and 'medicine' grass, and wrapped it tight in buckskin. They said it could talk, and must be kept close, or it would get away and tell the white men of that big killing by the Pawnee Rock. So the chief of the Missouris took it—that, and the fool white captain's steel shirt. And so, from that day father gave these things to son, father gave them to son, father gave them to son, until they are here in our hands by this fire."

Moonlight was thinking on that long-dead monk, whose Bible lay in the buckskin wrapper. He did not distrust the tale of Ironjacket; for he knew how,

word for word, the Indians preserve the accurate truth for centuries.

While Moonlight ruminated of that ancient slaughter by Pawnee Rock, with its little epilogue of blood on the near-by hill, Ironjacket was running another thought to earth.

"My son has looked at the squaw-man's 'medicine'?"

"Yes."

"Did it talk to him?"

"Yes."

"Is it a good 'medicine'?"

"It is good for white men. It would not talk to a Kiowa."

Ironjacket considered deeply.

"See now," he said at last, "because my son is a Kiowa, and because he brought back my honor when it was held by Gray Horse, I will do a new thing. I will give my son the squaw-man's 'medicine' to be his. But the steel shirt I will keep, since it is my name, and Ironjacket must not give away his name and the name of his fathers."

"And to-morrow my father will go to the hill where the squaw-man died?"

"There is a mark on the great soft rock at the top of the hill—a mark such as white men make. I shall show my son the squaw-man's mark. Now let us sleep, for there will be much time on the morrow, since Talk-a-heap"—that was Ironjacket's name for the voluble Jeff Horne—"cannot bring the big horse before dark. The next day I go back to my people on the Rabbit Ear."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE TREASURE OF DON LOPEZ

IRONJACKET turned into his lodge, and slept as became a warrior and an untroubled man. Moonlight sat by the fire, looking straight before him into the coals, as though their glowing bosoms held some worth-while secret that his gaze might in the end unlock. Not a sound arose to vex the night, nothing save the lipping mutter of the river fretting with its banks. The camp was death-still; the lodge, for any suggestion of sound that came from it, might have been empty of all life. An Indian is savage, but not vulgar; he never snores, and his commendable slumbers are as the deep sleep of a tree.

He was a study in the curious—our young gentleman by the fire. "Captain Moonlight!"—"Old Tom Moonlight!"—those were but names of respect, mere titles of a regional nobility. The taste of the Panhandle had conferred them on him, in admiration of his stark courage and a fortitude without a flaw. They had a sober sound, those names, and a weight that belonged with years. And yet they were so much a contradiction, that he who wore them was hardly better than a boy.

In those lands of unsafety where no law exists, and one's hand must keep one's head, the features pick up a kind of facial caution of their own. Especially are the eyes and mouth instructed in an iron

impassivity that cloaks emotion, and makes a mask behind which the man loves or hates, or saves or slays, unbetrayed as to the sentiment that underlies. It is the caste-mark of the wilderness. The desert dweller who would be equal to his bleak estate must rise above and beyond the changing touch of joy or sorrow, hope or fear. He may be fire within; he must be ice without. This comes not so much from pride as from an instinct of defense; albeit, like much that finds root in prudence, it oft turns to vanity in its fruit.

Our young friend by the fire was quite the native flower of his surroundings. No cactus of unyielding thorn could have been more stubbornly natural to that hard environment. The desert never conciliates, never compromises; it asks no quarter, gives none. And such would have been the picture of our young fire-gazing friend, had one been there to paint it.

In favor of truth, however, there should be thrown in some measure of qualification. Our young friend was one of those sphinx-like indurated natures merely while folk were looking on. Let a stranger encounter him; at once his manner was replete of no concession, non-surrender; the best that stranger might win from him was a truce. His face would offer but the poor choice of two expressions. These belonged with the gray eyes. They were like a pair of sentries—those eyes. They challenged. And there came nothing more warmly friendly than that challenge. He was either one's enemy, or he turned his back. Commonly it was the latter; for he seemed hedged of an arctic indifference that, courting nothing and

caring for naught, was fine only in being as bendless as an oak. Byron, in his affected hour, would have written a poem on him.

You are to understand that our young friend was these several granite things while he felt the gaze of folk upon him. Now, as he sat alone, his guard of face relaxed. Those eyes, so ready to command or menace, became notably soft. As they brooded upon the dying embers, what lights and shadows ebbed or flowed in the gray depths were as gentle processions of sentiment.

To the reader of faces those lights and shadows would have told of a mood, self-accusatory and sorrowful, and spoken of memories freighted of regrets. Conscience is remembrance plus deduction, and, with a mind busy over the past, and indulging in inferences far from self-flattering, our young friend was shrinking under the lash of conscience. Also, he seemed a bit surprised that this should be so; from which one is to argue that these visitations were new.

And yet their sources were not far to seek. His trouble might have been diagnosed as one with that of Kipling's gorilla. He had too much ego in his cosmos. Only he did not know; since Kipling was not to write till later. Too much pride, too much sentiment—these were his defects. Likewise he suffered from a lack of that common, workaday wit of give-and-take, which will believe in half a loaf rather than believe in none.

Our young friend began to think aloud—a bad habit, significant of a soul feeding upon itself.

"I begin to believe," said he, giving the fire a little

vicious shove with his foot to bring the brands together—"I begin to believe that while a man is born sane, he wanders mentally as he grows old. My method of life—of which I was a trifle fond—ceases all at once to please. What has come over me? What sudden wisdom have I gained?"

Our young friend, being an egotist, would never have guessed. To one older, and not so personally concerned, that irritating soul-turmoil wherein he found himself would have been easily explained. A very radical, and yet very usual, element had been thrust into the equation of his nature. Like some bright bird glancing through the twilight aisles of a wood, there had come the beautiful vision of a girl. He had looked at Robert; but he saw Ethel. To his half-fed fancy she was as the sublimation of soft loveliness.

Still, had one so told him he would have denied it. He would have remembered—with a scowl—only Robert. For Ethel had left her sweet impression, not upon his memory but upon his heart, and our troubled one—to his soul's scandal—held but few conferences with his heart. Now that neglected organ had resolved to be heard; it was that heart-voice, so strange and so unrecognized, speaking what he did not understand, which had set him to self-distrust, and to questioning a past the round full virtues whereof he never before distrusted.

This was as heaven meant it should be. There come proverbs to tell of love's blindness. It is false talk; no man sees himself until his eyes have been opened by love. And so with our dissatisfied one. Ethel had come; and the conviction of her tender-

ness and pure truth fell all across him like a light. By it the ungrace of his own life stood revealed. He reviewed himself; and the portrait did not please him.

"I have based myself," he said, in a tone wherein contempt and regret were mingled, "I have based myself on myself, like an eagle on a crag; and, like the eagle, I look about to find mere loneliness and desolation."

There was a pause.

"Are you proud of your thews? A cheap boast, truly! Every buffalo, every bear is stronger! The antelope is fleeter; the hawk has a truer eye! And your courage?" This, with a sneer: "Courage? It is as common as buffalo grass! So few are without it that in all my life I've met but three cowards. One, I saw to-day." At the thought of Robert he glowered. "I should have wrung round his neck, had it not been for disgracing these fingers!"

His self-criticism took another course.

"Are these better"—holding out his hands—"because there is blood upon them? What a poor brag to say that one has taken life! One may even slay, and not defeat! Sun Boy? I held his knife-hand with my left, and drove my blade through his throat. I looked into his eyes; they neither wavered nor failed. They glared back into mine; the man died unconquered. I myself could have done no more. Fortitude? Ironjacket, asleep in his lodge, might over-match me! Pierced through and through with what to him was more than death, he took his wound as the wolf takes its wound and crept aside, asking no sympathy. For what have I lived?"

There came no answer to the last. He gazed at the fire a moment, and with a toss of the hand exclaimed:

"Possibly, my life is not my fault! The disaster may be congenital, and I—as my discerning father declared—a simple Recurrence—a Repetition—a Recrudescence—in brief, a Throwback." He concluded with a gesture of disgust, as one who weakly confesses too much: "Come; I'm not so important as I would make it appear! I too much dwell upon myself!"

Which last was the truest word he spoke that night.

Moonlight shook himself like a swimming dog. It was as though he would dismiss the thoughts that weighed upon his spirits as the dog dismisses the water from its coat. He picked up the buckskin packet, and began to unfasten the deer-sinew ligatures. Unfolding it, he took out a Bible. The black covers were cracked with time, but still defended successfully the body of the book. The print was Latin; the title page showed it to have come from the celebrated presses of Lucio in Florence, and the date of that printing was 1693. They did good work then; for the paper was as fresh, and the type as clear, as on the day it went first to the shelves.

Moonlight did not wander into the body of the volume; it was the fly-leaves, and what had been written thereon, that interested him. Already he had read it sundry times since the death of that Comanche horse-thief; but now he went back to it as earnestly as though it were new.

He threw a resin-soaked knot on the embers to give him light. There were three pages closely written in Spanish. The text was small, the ink had run a little and grown brown; none the less it could be

readily picked out. This is a free translation of what he read:

"*To whomsoever shall find these, my words, greeting:*

"In the year of our Lord, Seventeen hundred and Sixteen, being now the month of June, I, Jose, a brother of the Society of Jesus, sometime a student at Lisbon, say these things; trusting in the fullness of time thus to make known the fate of Don Lopez d' Salazar, and the expedition under him. We left Santa Fé with fifteen hundred souls—men, women and little children. Our purpose was to settle on the Great River, to the end that we claim the region for Spain, and hold in check the French, who were pushing north from Louisiana.

"The ground marked for our occupation was held by certain warlike savages called the Missouris. Our orders were to wage instantly against these pagans a war of extermination, as being for our best safety and the glory of Christ.

"The better to do this, we designed to make friends and allies of certain other savages, living to the south and west of the Missouris, and engaged in bloody feud with them. These were called Osages, and our scouts, sent forth from Santa Fé the season before, had reported on them as friendly to the Spanish. That report was either a lie, or the two warring tribes of Osage and Missouri had made meanwhile a peace. This the sequel will show.

"Two weeks before I write, if my count of the days be true, we encountered a party of the Osages. Don Lopez, yielding to the custom of these savages, smoked with their head man, and laid bare his mission.

"The head man of the Osages listened with respect, and apparent agreement. He assured Don Lopez of his friendship, and said that he would send for his warriors. They would come presently; and then, with Don Lopez and the soldiers, he and his Osages would fall upon the Missouris, whom—deceiving us —he professed to hate rancorously.

"Don Lopez waited; and at the end of seven days a force of two thousand warriors had gathered—a force five times the fighting strength of the Spaniards. Besides they attacked us without notice, taking Don Lopez by surprise, and slew all save myself who write these words.

"I had come as the secretary of Don Lopez. This was so that I might watch his actions, and report on them to my superiors. Don Lopez was suspected as a heretic in Spain, and had fallen under cloud of doubt with the Holy Inquisition. He himself must have had some hint; for he turned his fortune into precious stones, rubies mostly, by sacrificing it to the Jews, and then privily quitted Spain for the Americas.

"The Holy fathers, upon discovering his going, named me

to follow Don Lopez. As a stratagem I became his secretary; and next, much against my pleasure, I was compelled in these last days to go East with him across the desert. For it was thought that in the settlement projected, he would be found tolerating if not teaching doctrines inimical to Holy Mother Church.

"My service was not difficult, albeit I endured much hardship. Besides being secretary to Don Lopez, I was Chaplain of the expedition; but, such was the godlessness under Don Lopez, the duties of that post were but nominal. What befell us of spear and knife and hatchet, I verily take to be the judgment of an offended heaven upon our unrighteousness. But I must proceed: I have had nothing save a few bitter roots to eat for almost four days, and possess not too much strength for the task of setting this to ink and paper.

"When the treacherous Osages fell upon us, which they did with horrid yells and shouts, I was standing by my saddled horse, having but just dismounted. Pausing only to catch up the little metal box, which held the whole fortune of Don Lopez —and which had been entrusted to my hands as those safest and most honest—I threw myself upon my horse. I spurred south; for I could have aided nothing in the fight, which was after all but a slaughter, since I carried no arms other than my pens and inkhorn in my girdle, and moreover was cumbered of my monkish gown.

"As I say, taking the little treasure box of Don Lopez to save it out of the hands of those heathen Osages, I spurred south at top speed; and so busy were the savages dealing out death that none perceived, and I got clear away. I expected to be followed and slain, for there were horses fleeter than mine in our herds; but by the mercy of the Mother none saw me, and I made good my getting away. I kept at first to the south, thinking that after I was surely safe I would hold westward in hopes of finding Santa Fé.

"This hope has now been dashed. During my flight I had nothing to eat, and could find nothing, riding as I've said without weapons. The lack of food rendered me exceeding weak, and on the third day, being starved and the sun pouring down very hot, I fainted and fell from the saddle. When I recovered, which I did shortly, my horse had wandered away, and was lost. Nor have I seen it since.

"At the time of this catastrophe I was on the south bank of a considerable stream, which I had crossed several hours before and whose course I was then following toward the west. I was near the foot of a high hill, tree-crowned; the base being thickly brushed and shady. To this hill I crawled, when I had gained the strength, and laying myself down in the shade, gradually got back still greater strength. There was a spring at the foot of the hill, the cool waters coming forth out of a little cave. I found the waters very refreshing, much superior in truth to the waters of the river, the latter being turbid with alkalies.

"Being strengthened by the pure water, I bethought me as to what I should do. In my then situation I would soon die of starving, and, with my horse gone, I could push on no farther. As night came down, I resolved to crawl to the top of the hill and, having flint and steel, make a fire of wood. I hoped thus to attract to my succor some roving band of savages. They might slay me; against this they might be prompted of heaven to save me. As it stood, I was doomed to die of no food, and the chance seemed worth taking. For three nights and days I have kept up my fire on the hill; so far nothing has come of it.

"The treasure box of Don Lopez I have secreted in the little cave out of which bubbles the spring—the waters whereof have preserved my strength most wondrously. The casket is buried in the very bottom of the spring and covered with a thin slate from the hill. Neither the casket nor the treasure can take harm from the water, since the one is gold, enclosed in sheet steel, and the other made up of precious stones—many rubies, some emeralds, and a few diamonds.

"Should I die—as I well expect at this time—whoever shall find this, my Bible, is to have the treasure. For Don Lopez is surely dead—I saw him fall—and was moreover a bachelor of no heirs. Besides, he was a heretic; I had collected ample proof of it, when the traitor Osages smote upon us. I say again, whosoever shall find the treasure is to have it and hold it; only I charge that he give to the Society of Jesus one-tenth.

"The cave of the spring is on the eastern slope of the hill at the extreme base. I have carved as deeply as I might, with so poor a tool as the steel tongue of my buckle, a cross in the rock that crests the hill, and by that the hill may be surely known. The substance of the rock is soft; but I have carved deeply, and it should take centuries of weather to wear away the cross.

"Dig in the bottom of the spring for the treasure box. I shall keep up my hilltop fire while I have strength to feed it; but my strength is becoming less and less from want of nourishment, and my hope is wasting with my strength. For all that, with only half my promised days run out—being now in my thirty-fifth year—I still say that the Will of God is my will.

"JOSE F."

Moonlight closed the time-worn volume, and fell into a muse. "Heretofore," he ruminated, "I have lived as the wolves live, with no more thought of the morrow than of yesterday. I was content to pull down each day's beef each day. And since I lived happily, why should I now think on gold? Is it this monk's tale?" He cast more wood on the

coals. "Why delude myself? I but grow weary of life as it is. To be first among savages is not enough. And yet where else should I be first or even second? Where a man, with the weapons of a man, may assert his manhood in the face of nature, I can prove myself a leader. All that would fail and fade in regions more civilized. In the country of folk quiet and law-guided—for example the country of those whom I saw to-day—to what art or what craft might I turn hand or head? No; it is settled. Long ago I gave in my choice, and now I am captive to that choice. I made the desert my bed, and in the desert I must lie. What then? I am still dissatisfied. Argument will not curb nor necessity quiet the uneasiness that has seized me. More; I am prophet enough to know that it will continue to creep upon me like ivy upon a wall."

He glanced wistfully at the book in his fingers, and then opened it again at those Spanish-written fly-leaves.

"From this treasure of the dead and gone Don Lopez," he went on, softly, as though debating a point with himself, "I might—being so fortunate as to find it—fashion freedom for myself. I had thought I owned the wilderness; I now see that the wilderness owns me. This treasure of which the dead monk tells would mean my liberation. But who is to discover it now? It would be too much to suppose that it lies there ready to one's hand, after a lapse of more than a century and a half. The spring may have dried up. Or some traveler, digging in the spring for deeper water, may have hit upon it." Then decisively: "None the less I shall

have a look—hoping no hopes. Yes, I shall look; and so ease my soul's fret for the feel and the sight of those rubies" He glanced across at the black outlines of the hill, pointed to by Ironjacket as the scene of the Jesuit's taking off.

"It is," he observed, following a long pause, "a strange coincidence that I should find my old Kiowa, as I bring him the monk's book, camped within arrow-flight of the very place."

Moonlight wrapped himself in the gay blanket which the politeness of Ironjacket had left him, and pulling his saddle toward him for a pillow, was presently sleeping as soundly as were the others. If dreams came they were pleasant dreams of gold and pretty faces. Also so deep were his slumbers that the friendly morning sun, when it shone in his face to wake him, found no traces of them.

An Indian is never in a hurry, unless he is after a foe or a foe is after him. The day had worn itself into the west before Ironjacket with a grunt, tolerant of paleface curiosity, signified his readiness to convoy Moonlight to the dead monk's hill. Ironjacket was in full panoply of Kiowa war, with face painted in as many colors as Joseph's scriptural coat, when he mounted his best pony for the journey. The hill was distant about a furlong; but no Indian walks when he may ride. There is a dignity indigenous to a pony's back; and Ironjacket never forgot dignity.

Moonlight also mounted and rode by the Kiowa's side.

"Has my son again talked with the dead squaw-man's 'medicine'?"

"While my father slept, we talked together. It

said the squaw-man, and those others who died by the Pawnee Rock, never knew it was the Missouris that rubbed them out. They died thinking it was the Osages."

"Good!" quoth Ironjacket. "Until the sun and moon and stars run together like water, and what was dark is made light, they will fight the Osages in the land of spirits for what my fathers did—my fathers, who were Missouris."

Moonlight made no effort to correct the theology of Ironjacket. He knew that an Indian's theology is immutable. Hard as glass, it will turn the edge of any paleface argument, however keen.

"Is it not strange," said Moonlight at last, as the ponies paced side by side, "that my father, at the time I bring him the squaw-man's 'medicine,' should be seated in the shadow of this hill? There are many hills; and yet my father is by this hill."

"Your father waited here for his lost 'medicine,'" replied Ironjacket composedly. "The squaw-man's 'medicine' was also lost; and your father came, knowing the squaw-man's spirit would be camped here, waiting for the return of its 'medicine.' The two would return together; and so it was good that your father should wait close by the spirit of the dead squaw-man. My son can now see"—here Ironjacket complacently sleeked with his hand the beloved beaver-skin hung jealously about his neck—"that this was wise. The squaw-man's 'medicine' is very strong; it brought back the 'medicine' of Ironjacket, which the mean handling of a Comanche liar had made weak and sick."

On the high point of the hill overlooking the river

there jutted skyward a huge rounded rock. It was buried in oak bushes and hedged in by a thick-sown guard of cedars. Ironjacket led the way to the rock, and pointed to the face that looked toward the east.

"The squaw-man's mark," said Ironjacket, gravely. "Does my son see?"

There on the eastern face, moss-grown but evident, was carved a great cross. Moonlight stooped, and cleared away the moss with his knife. There could be no doubt; it was indeed the dead monk's cross. His pulses quickened, for he remembered those hidden rubies of Don Lopez.

*Moonlight was lost in a contemplation of the Cross.*

## CHAPTER VII

### THE RED BULL OF THE CROSS–8

Five minutes went by, during which Moonlight was lost in a contemplation of the cross, and what it should promise. He was interrupted by an exclamation from the Kiowa.

"Talk-a-heap!" ejaculated Ironjacket.

Moonlight looked up. Far away, where the sparsely planted cottonwoods offered a view from the hill, could be seen Jeff Horne. With him rode that Red River Bill, who was supposed to own an amiable weakness for fandangoes. Their ponies were being urged to that long, loping canter called in the southwest—where there are no roads—a "road gait."

In addition to the ones they bestrode, Jeff and his companion were bringing two riderless ponies, one being led by Jeff, who was having trouble in restraining its propensities for speed. The led pony was a dark bay, taller and heavier than the others. In the bright thin air, even at a distance of three miles, it broke upon the sight of those on the hill as sharply clear as an etching. The fourth pony—packed to the ears, it was—Red River Bill was driving loose before him.

"Talk-a-heap," commented Ironjacket, with approval, "rides fast. He brings my son's big horse

And now," he concluded, following a pause, "Ironjacket will go to the Rabbit Ear."

"I thought my father spoke of to-morrow for that journey."

Ironjacket pointed to the thither side of the Canadian, where Southwind and Firelight could be seen driving northward their ponies, the latter loaded with lodge poles, robes, kettles and generally the household equipment of Ironjacket. Wet and dripping, they had just emerged from the ford.

Ironjacket became explanatory.

"Squaws," said he, in tones of condescension, "are ever mad to be with squaws. Southwind and the Firelight could not wait for another sun. They were hungry for woman-talk."

With this sage setting forth of reasons for an immediate adjournment of his household to the Rabbit Ear, as a place promising social advantages beyond those provided by the loneliness of the Canadian, Ironjacket led the way down the hillside. Once on the flat below, without further farewells, he pushed his pony into the river, and went squattering and plunging across, water sometimes to the fetlocks, sometimes shoulder deep. On the far shore he wheeled and waved his hand in a last aboriginal good-by. That courtesy complete, he dug his moccasined heels into the pony's flanks, and was presently established in the van of the family procession, where, when his domestic outfit is on the march, a Kiowa warrior, for arguments of defense and pride, invariably takes his post.

Being now alone, Moonlight rounded the base of the monk's hill for a look at its eastern face. He was

pardonably curious concerning that treasure-concealing spring. More often than once in traveling up and down the trail, he had passed and repassed the hill; but he had never bestowed upon it anything beyond a careless glance. From the monk's fly-leaf memoranda, he had taken the impression that the hill toward the east fell off with reasonable abruptness, offering a brush-sown, rocky steep. Hidden away at the base should somewhere be the cave, with its outgushing spring, in the bottom sands of which those Don Lopez rubies, wrapped in their gold steel-protected box, lay buried.

Our young explorer was not one who on slight occasion hopes extravagantly. For all that, the monk's story had taken hold on his imagination. The fact found suggestion in that chill of disappointment which now overswept him. On doubling the hill's foot he found, instead of what he had pictured, the eastern face of the hill to be just no face at all. Rather it was a huge shouldering bulk of sand, that, resting against the hill, reached far out on the bottom lands beyond. Instead of oak brush and pines, springing from a rocky face, there, smoothly rounded, rose this baby mountain of sand. It had been builded by the sand storms during the tireless years. The face of the hill, as the ruby-hiding Jesuit had found it, was wholly obliterated.

It called for no civil engineer to deduce what had happened in those many sand-drifting years, and Moonlight solved the riddle at a glance. He turned his pony's nose, and rode out upon the grassy flat to gain a better survey. As nearly as the eye might measure, the cave where those rubies of Don Lopez

had been *cached* was buried beneath a sand-drift of full one hundred feet. To talk of digging was to talk of men and horses and scrapers by the score. He gave way to an exclamation of angry impatience. He would have been loath to confess how much a passion to possess that Don Lopez treasure had crept upon him.

Riding in toward the giant sand-drift, he slowly skirted its fringe where the sand joined the grass in the bottom-lands. In this perambulation he kept his eyes fixed upon the ground. At last he found where a thin rivulet came seeping forth.

"That is from my dead monk's spring," he thought. Then he lifted his gaze to the huge sand-shoulder, covering acres with its foundations: "That treasure-box might as well be at the bottom of the Pacific! It's plain," ran his thoughts, "that if I ever redeem myself from this thraldom of the wilderness, which has begun so much to irk me, my friend, Don Lopez, with his rubies, is not fated to pay the ransom."

As he gazed, there arose in his mind a whimsical, half-superstitious notion that the shades of the Jesuit and his master, Don Lopez, had invoked those sand-piling storms, and so covered safe against his treasure-seeking that engaging casket.

While Moonlight paused, eyes upon the little stream, mind busy over vain schemes of wildcat engineering, the voluble Jeff, with Red River Bill and the four ponies, swept patteringly up. The two had espied their leader as they came up the trail, and struck across to join him. The inquisitive Jeff was prompt in noting the thoughtful attitude of his young chief.

"What is it, Cap'n?" he queried. Jeff's native

jauntiness of spirit by the way had been in no wise worn down by his long ride to the Palo Duro. "Whatever be you-all puzzlin' over—if it ain't no secret?"

"What am I puzzling over? I'm puzzling over yonder sand-drift." Then, teasingly, willing to multiply the mystery to the curious Jeff, he added: "Under it lie my fortune and my future."

At this bit of news Jeff cocked a sage eye, as though, under the sand-heaped circumstances, he regarded Moonlight's fortune and future as among things lost.

Dismissing one subject for another, he finally nodded toward the impatient bay where it stood mouthing its Spanish bit as if waiting for notice.

"Here's President," said he, with the up and down manner of one making a report. "Likewise here's Red River Bill." Then, coming last to the pack-pony who, taking advantage of the halt, was sagaciously cropping the grass: "Also, allowin' that you-all would feel like puttin' on dog some at that Ruggles *baile*, Red River an' me decides to fetch your Sunday clothes. Thar they be in that pack. 'If the Cap'n will shake a laig with them Cross-8 Mexicans,' says I to Red River, 'the same bein' a play which I in no wise endorses, then he shore ought to shake that laig in style.' So, as I says, we nacherally packs over them gala habiliments of yourn; an' thar they be."

While Jeff was pleasing himself with this recount of what he had done, President, nostril hollyhocked, ears pointed, neck arched, eyes like two moons, pressed up and rubbed his black soft muzzle against his master's knee. Moonlight in response gently

stroked the swelling neck; whereat President breathed loudly, as horses will when under strong emotions that they are unable to express.

"Howdy, Red River!" observed Moonlight.

Red River Bill, a youth of twenty, was a fair specimen of the craft of cows. His bronzed face, guiltless of beard, seemed the home of silence and self-reliance —badges of solitude and wild, wide-spreading wastes. At the "Howdy!" his tanned face lighted up.

"Ridin' easy, Cap'n," he responded.

Having said so much, Red River sunk again into silence, leaving Jeff to do the talking, a burden which that personage was always willing to take up.

"Do we go over to the Cross-8 this evenin'?" asked Jeff, who began to feel like putting a period to the day's ride; "or do we camp yere, an' go over to-morry?"

"We will round that point of rocks," returned Moonlight, pointing to the north shoulder of the dead monk's hill, "and camp where Ironjacket's lodge was pitched. I reckon we'll find his fire still burning, for it isn't an hour since he left."

"Pulled his freight, has he?" queried Jeff.

"Ironjacket has found his lost 'medicine,' and now he's on his way to the Rabbit Ear."

"Found his 'medicine,' eh? Thar'll be roast-dog doin's among them Wolf Robe Kiowas when he reaches 'em"; and Jeff gave way to a low, envious whistle of admiration.

The ranch-house of the Cross-8, Captain Ruggles owner, was of Mexican architecture and construction. It was a wide-spreading, one-story, window-

less, mud-built edifice. There had been a prudent thought for its defense; and two corners, diagonally opposite one another, bulged into rude, circular little towers. Riflemen perched on the roofs of these could control by their fire the four sides of the building.

The roof of the structure, towers and all, was mud piled on beams and rafters made from unbarked trees, and to save it from the rains a rank coat of grass had been taught to grow there. The adobe walls of the house had been carried four feet above the roof, and the garrison, in case of attack, could take to that grass-sown platform. Once there, they might from behind those four-foot battlements fight as from a fort. Twenty cool hands should have held at bay an entire tribe of savages.

The one opening to the big mud ranch-house—known among the Mexicans of the region for its size and strength as the "Casa Grande"—was a wide double door, the thick folds of which when closed were locked by a mighty cross-bar. For a furlong about the house the cottonwoods had been cut away, so as to afford no shelter to an approaching foe. The Comanche or the Kiowa who attacked the Cross-8 would have to attack in the open; and the mere thought of riding forth into the open against rifle-crowned walls will turn an Indian's soul sick. He has no stomach for such turgid military operations; but prefers to find his prey in the open, and overpower him by at least ten for one.

Not because he was loved, but because his mud-made ranch-house was deemed impregnable, Captain Ruggles had lived for years on the Canadian, hostile

Indians coming and going all about him, without being once assailed. Occasionally a Mexican herder was killed and scalped, while abroad among the cattle; but those were catastrophes too small to engage seriously the large attention of Captain Ruggles.

"I am," said he, in a burst of candid self-description, "always patient about the troubles of other folks."

Captain Ruggles was not popular among Panhandle Americans. He had taken to wife in his day a Mexican woman; and in Texas that is worse than murder or holding up a stage. The lady had been rich in flocks and herds, which was doubtless the reason of Captain Ruggles' love. Certainly, by popular tradition, there had been little in her looks to bring him to his knees. She had been hideously ugly—besides being the color of a saddle.

"Old Ruggles must have picked her out by candlelight," was the comment of one Scotty, given at the time.

Scotty, who sometimes carried the mail between Tascosa and Dodge, spoke as one having metropolitan opportunities to perfect his taste in feminine beauty; wherefore, his decision that "Old Ruggles" had wedded the ugliest woman between the Rio Grande and the Platte had been widely heard and everywhere accepted. The lady had been dead for eighteen years; a fact, however, which in no wise lifted that load of disrepute from Captain Ruggles which, in the beginning, his espousal of a Mexican imposed upon him in the minds of all right thinking folk.

No American worked for Captain Ruggles or had

place in his service. For the reason of that Mexican Mrs. Ruggles, an American of pure strain would have held himself disgraced had he found his name on the Cross-8 pay rolls. Those about Captain Ruggles, who looked up to him as master were Mexicans of the peon caste; and this perhaps better pleased the fancy of the old renegade, since they were the more readily inspired with fear, and therefore more easily managed.

Captain Ruggles was wont, on offense given or cause furnished, to rush among his Mexicans with hoarse berserk bellowings, striking right and left, knocking the criminals about like nine-pins. Thus it befell that he was vastly respected by his retainers, who—for those bellowings and headlong charges—called him the *Toro Colorow* or Red Bull, a title of which he was proud. In age he had passed fifty years; in figure he was round and unwieldy; his hair was red, shot with gray; and his complexion—which stubbornly resisted every tanning influence of sun and weather—had turned a boiled, choleric hue. It was this last which suggested to the Mexican imagination the adjective of "colorow."

While the Red Bull was a thunderbolt of aggressive war where Mexicans were concerned, his manner became singularly suave and pacific when set to deal with Americans. The inspiration of this soft forbearance was obvious when one understands that the last thing for which the Red Bull really hungered was battle. He was too wary, too fond of safety and a profit. There lurk no dividends in duels, and the prudent Red Bull nursed as first among many pet aphorisms, the following:

"A gun-fight is one of those things you see best from a distance."

There was a redeeming element in the ugly whole of the Cross-8 establishment, being in truth the Red Bull's daughter, the Doña Inez. It is not to be supposed that she resembled her mother, for her dark beauty shone out against the harshness of her environment like a cactus flower against the homely grays and browns and dust-colors of its native plains. Also, the Doña Inez was of an imperious vein, and her high-tempered father came and went on the breath of her commands, or said "Yes" or "No"—only he said it in Spanish—at the lifting or the lowering of her little imperious finger. Even in his hour of profoundest raging, the Red Bull would stifle his bellowings if Doña Inez but raised repressive palm. And now when she was to be betrothed, and on a soon day wedded to Don Anton Baca, every one about the Cross-8 felt depressed at the prospect. For her father held by her as by the light of day, and the peons on their side argued that, once she were gone, the Red Bull would bellow and charge with fresh fury unrestrained.

And yet, the Mexicans were fond of their Red Bull master, for all he knocked them about. A Mexican does not like to be mauled; but he likes regular hours, and work well ordered, less. The Red Bull was as shiftless, and as much the soul of careless disorder, as any Mexican could be; he cared nothing for almanacs, nothing for clocks; and with him as with them, for every purpose of labor, to-morrow was superior to to-day. This easy slackness deeply dovetailed with the wild, idle, half-baked inclinations of his adher-

ents, and gave him a place in their esteem from which no amount of assault and battery could shake him. Altogether, the Cross-8 was not such a hive of discontent, not such a sink of unhappiness, as one might have supposed. The ruling influence, while passionate, was lazy, generous, careless; which was precisely the kind of influence that matches the slipshod Mexican heart. Besides, was there not that lamp of beauty, the Doña Inez—as radiant as a star!—as high above them as a saint!—before whom they might bow down and worship?

When Cato's eyes fell upon the Cross-8 ranch, in a first thankfulness he unconsciously stopped the surrey. Compared with the rude savagery of the lodge of the alarming Ironjacket, here was a fortress of civilization. The pause was only momentary; quickly recovering, Cato brought his team forward at even a better speed than before.

"I sho' shan't mind gettin' into d' company of folks ag'in," he said, partly to himself and partly to Professor Doremus.

There was little in the sunbaked prospect to enlist one fresh from the green meadows of Somerset, and yet the sight of the Cross-8 ranch brought almost as much relief to Aunt Tilda as to Cato. It opened a chance to shift the conversation, and came tactfully to the relief of Robert, who under the words of Ethel, and the chilly attitude of Professor Doremus, had been made to feel like a detected coward, and was now sitting, tongue-tied and wordless beneath the smart.

"What an idea," commented Aunt Tilda, "to build a house without windows! And see"—point-

ing to the scattered, weather-stained stumps—"how they have cut away the trees, as though coolness and shade were the synonyms of pestilence!"

"My dear Madam," observed Professor Doremus, who was not wanting in certain archaic war theories, born of much reading of Homer, "I think the features of which you complain are intended to be defensive."

From the parapet of the house hung countless strings of red peppers curing in the sun. These blazed out against the sad dun-colored landscape like a fire in a forest.

"They make one think of a cataract of coral!" exclaimed Ethel, to whom color was a music of the eye.

Mounted on a pony much too small for his weight, a bulky figure came riding forth to meet them. It was none other indeed than the Red Bull himself; he had been warned of their coming and was on the lookout.

This honor of a personal going forth to greet them on the worthy Red Bull's part was not without making a grave impression on the local Mexican mind. It at once established the new-comers as *ricos*, and gave Robert and Professor Doremus the rank of Dons; for it could be no slight matter that set the Red Bull in the saddle, as his retainers were well aware. He welcomed the travelers with an elaborate politeness, the growth of his years among the Mexicans, and was particularly courteous toward Aunt Tilda and Ethel.

As the party approached the ranch-house, the heavy double doors swung wide, and the Red Bull, with an effort that almost resulted in apoplexy, extricated himself from his stirrups and ushered them

in. He led them across the *patio*, an enclosed open space within the walls of the house. This square—quite an eighth of an acre—was a nodding wilderness of flowers, with a spring of cool water bubbling in its midst. From the *patio* he marshaled them into the *sala* or reception hall, and there bade them be seated.

"The Doña Inez," he said, "will be here in a moment."

As though their coming were a signal, a Mexican girl bustled in bearing an armful of cedar, and albeit the day was warm soon had a blaze crackling in the mud fireplace. As she went about her fire-building, turning now and then a shy inquisitive glance upon the visitors, Aunt Tilda's attention was drawn to her. Brow, nose, cheeks, chin—the girl's entire face, except certain wide uncanny circles about the eyes and mouth, was stained a sanguinary crimson. It was as though she wore a hideous blood-red mask.

"What is it?" whispered Aunt Tilda, in tones between awe and horror. "Is she suffering from some plague?"

The sophisticated Red Bull, to whom the question was put, could hardly repress a laugh, while the girl discovering that she had become the subject of the conversation, drew her *reboza* or shawl over her highly painted countenance, and scuttled away with the timidity of a rabbit.

"No, Madam, I assure you!" panted the Red Bull, when he had mastered his emotion. "It is the juice of the *alegria* plant. There is to be the betrothal celebration of the Doña Inez and Don Anton Baca, and poor Bonita stained her face three weeks ago in anticipation of it, being determined to look as white

and pretty as she could. She is quite a belle, is Bonita, and the face-painting was intended to assist her complexion. You'll get used to it, Madam; all Mexican girls bleach their faces with the *alegria.*"

The Red Bull might have given reins to his merriment, but the severe dignity of Aunt Tilda daunted him. Moreover he was—being Mexicanized—doubly bound to courtesy toward strangers in his own house. The Red Bull had taken his manners from the Mexicans, who got theirs from the Spaniards, who got theirs from the Moors, who got theirs from the Arabs; and the Arabs are the congenital Chesterfields of the world. Wherefore, the Red Bull would have been no one to laugh at the horror of Aunt Tilda, even if her superior air had not held him in check.

As the Red Bull made his explanation, there arose a thin rustle of silk, and the Doña Inez entered the *sala.* Going first to Aunt Tilda and then to Ethel, she kissed one and the other on the cheeks, and said in a queer, lisping English:

"You are welcome."

## CHAPTER VIII

### DON ANTON AND THE DOÑA INEZ

THE Doña Inez was barbarically beautiful. Black straight brows—black deep midnight eyes—black fog of hair, as fine as finest silk, growing low and thick on the forehead—skin, not white, not brown, but wheat-hued, with a rose-flush blushing in the round cheeks, and coloring the ripe lips, between which gleamed teeth small, even, white as milk—such might have been the sketch of her loveliness. With little or nothing of the Saxon showing, the Doña Inez had sprung altogether from her mother's people.

The glow and flash of her beauty quite swept into captivity the fancy of Ethel, who had begun to be a little lonely, feeling socially cast away and in need of girlish companionship. The Doña Inez gazed at Ethel with bright, quick bird-like glances, which Ethel repaid with glances quite as bright, but of a soberer glint. It was clear that these maidens approved of one another.

"You are welcome," repeated the Doña Inez, this time with her eyes on Ethel. "My father told me you were coming, and I was glad. Now when I see you I am more glad."

"Is the place to which we are going far from here?"

Ethel already meditated an endless chain of calls on the Doña Inez.

"It is nothing!" cried the Doña Inez, who instinctively understood. "Twenty miles, perhaps! And what is that? Two hours in the saddle—a scamper!"

"Then"—and Ethel, who was no hermit in her heart, breathed with relief—"then we may see each other often?"

"Every day," responded the Doña Inez. The heiress of the house of Ruggles was blandly unconventional. "Yes; we shall pay each other long visits—you and I."

The Doña Inez became hospitably mindful that her new friends were wayfarers, fresh from a wearisome trail. Disdaining a chair, she sat down tailorwise, that is to say, cross-legged, on a red Navajo blanket which served as a partial carpet for the clay floor. She looked very pretty, so Robert and Professor Doremus thought, as thus established she gave herself up to the concoction of chocolate in an ancient Moorish silver pot. It was for this purpose of chocolate that the cedar-wood fire had been kindled. Presently the chocolate was passed about in fragile china cups, by a Mexican girl, who was not Bonita of the painted face.

"Bonita is a fool!" explained the Doña Inez, who owned to notions of a dress-reform sort. "Why should she daub her face with *alegria?* That will do no good; she should put flour on it."

The Doña Inez let her silken *reboza* slip down about her shoulders. The garment was a startling combination in black and yellow. Taken with the arch innocence—friendly at once and daring—of the black eyes, it made her appear like a little ingenuous tigress.

Ethel, who was a born milliner, thought she had

never beheld anything more bewilderingly fetching. She ran the *reboza* over with a copying eye, remembering meanwhile that proverb concerning Rome and Romans.

While Ethel and the Doña Inez were thus broadening the foundations of their young acquaintance, Professor Doremus, Robert, and the Red Bull, with Aunt Tilda lending an interested ear, had plunged into what distances and difficulties separated the travelers from their journey's end.

"You must not think of to-morrow," observed the hospitable Red Bull. "There was a storm to the west, and the high water has left the ford in no shape for wagons. You understand about the quicksand fords in this region, Professor? You must rest easy then for at least three days. Don Anton Baca should be here by nightfall. There will be music and a *baile;* and my herders are to hold a kind of bronco-riding, cattle-roping tournament. Don Anton offers a saddle, silver embossed, and brought especially from Chihuahua, as a prize. So you see your stay should pass quickly."

The Red Bull was the beaming jovial host in every feature.

"It's the truth; the ford is impassable. Besides," —here the Red Bull winked a watery eye gregariously—"ford or no ford, I should have hung onto you. Good company is scarce along the Canadian, and as keeper of the trail I exact not less than a three-days' stay from all who travel it. What do you say, Madam?" he concluded, addressing Aunt Tilda.

"I say," returned the good lady, with a courtesy to match the Red Bull's, "that you are very good to

make us so welcome. It would be difficult to thank you too much—you and your beautiful daughter."

"Welcome!" retorted the Red Bull heartily, his brickdust face a shade deeper as though for emphasis; "why then, I call it nothing more than neighborly! We are to live within twenty miles of each other; and that in the Panhandle means next door."

The Red Bull, following chocolate, recommended Aunt Tilda and Ethel, with the Doña Inez to bear them company, to the flowers in the *patio*.

"They should refresh your eyes," said he, "after the dust-colored scenery through which you have come."

The energetic Red Bull was for showing Robert and the Professor through the sundry belongings of the ranch. For exhibition enterprises of this character he had all the heart that an Eastern farmer possesses for showing the visitor his cattle and horses and hogs.

Aunt Tilda preferred to accompany the Red Bull and the others on their stroll, and declined the *patio* and the flowers. She felt a call for practical information, not to say instruction, in this life of cattle upon which they were about to commence, and said as much.

"We are what you call tenderfeet, Captain," she explained.

"We'll soon harden you, Madam; we'll soon have you sophisticated. The cattle trade is as simple as seven-up. Besides, the Bar-Z is but a small outfit, with only about a thousand head, as shown by last spring's branding, and that will make your work the easier."

The Red Bull led the way through the double doors into the outward world beyond. Taking Robert by the arm, he carried the little party from branding-pen to blacksmith-shop, from the camp-house where the Mexican riders slept to the corral where their ponies were confined, laying bare every ranch mystery as it arose. Robert listened with interest; embarked with his whole fortune, his dangerous ignorance of the cattle business had begun to oppress him, and he was eager to go to school.

Professor Doremus, with Aunt Tilda upon his polite old arm, brought up the rear. As they progressed, he expounded learnedly, and Aunt Tilda was quite lost in a cloud of admiration.

The Professor had just identified the cactus as "a polypetalous plant of the dicotyledonous order, belonging to the Indian fig family," when his eloquence was broken in upon by the sharp bark of a six-shooter. Aunt Tilda gave a half-suppressed scream. Thereupon the Professor, both lover and warrior by nature, arched his crest protectively.

"What was it?" queried Aunt Tilda faintly, yet feeling somewhat put out with herself because of that feminine scream.

The affair was quickly understood. A rattlesnake, planted in their path, had protested the advance of Robert and the Red Bull, and the latter had met the protest with his six-shooter. In a region where a Colt's pistol is as commonplace as a handkerchief and forms an every-day element of a gentleman's attire, the Red Bull had for the moment overlooked Aunt Tilda's untrained nerves. Her quick cry brought him to a realizing sense of this.

"Pardon me, Madam!" he began. "Being used to the Doña Inez, who is more ready with a pistol than a needle, I forgot myself. It was a blunder. Coming, as you do, straight from civilization, I should have remembered that you were sure to be a bit gun-shy."

Aunt Tilda called up a smile.

"It was nothing!" she said. "Indeed, I'm not sorry it happened, since I must get inured to pistols and rattlesnakes." She made an involuntary clutch at the Professor.

That scientist was already pleasantly engaged with the—to him—remarkable fact that the Red Bull's bullet had blown off the rattlesnake's head. Giving himself the air of an expert, he drew Robert's attention to this; and Robert—whose cheek at the sudden flash of the pistol had become as white as Aunt Tilda's—gulped, and pretended admiration.

"Really, Captain!" cried Professor Doremus, surveying the headless reptile, now writhing out its reluctant life, "really! a capital shot! I, myself, have some art of powder and ball, and I never saw better! You sighted for the creature's head."

"That's the curious part of it, Professor. You should give all the credit to the snake. The snake sighted its head for the gun. It's one of the queer kinks in the make-up of a rattlesnake. Point your pistol at him, and he will look squarely into the muzzle, moving his head this way or that until he's brought the sights to a line. Whoever shoots at a rattlesnake inevitably shoots away its head."

"Most wondrous!" exclaimed the Professor. "And is a willingness to assist in its own destruction common to all ophidians?"

The Red Bull said it was, and the Professor made a note.

By this time Robert had recovered his manhood, and Aunt Tilda her balance, and the walk was resumed, Aunt Tilda—skirts caught aside gingerly—giving the dying reptile a wide berth.

"They are not very dangerous," said the Professor, encouragingly. "Being thick, clumsy creatures, they are by no means sure of their blow. Nor are they as poisonous as printed, just as Satan is not so black as painted."

Aunt Tilda expressed relief to hear this. She had cherished the theory that death ever waited on the fangs of the rattlesnake. She would now feel easier concerning Ethel.

"They are an interesting specimen of the reptilia," observed the Professor, falling back into the naturalist: "Family, crotalidæ; it belongs with the solenoglyphic serpents or pit-vipers."

"Speaking of serpents," observed Robert carelessly, and addressing their host, "who is this insolent young fellow who, for all he's no older than myself, goes by the name of Old Tom Moonlight?"

The Red Bull's shifty eyes took on an expression of uneasiness. He waited a moment, as though to pick his words. What a gentleman says may be repeated, and a region of six-shooters is never a region of slander. Your neighbor may think things both black and hard about you; but he keeps them the safe side of his teeth.

"You have named a dangerous character," said the cautious Red Bull at last. "It is my duty, as a friend and neighbor, to warn you against him. At the same

time I must ask you not to repeat my words. This Old Tom Moonlight is reputed to be as savage as a wolf, and no more to be restrained. He would not hesitate to ride up to my ranch at noon, and shoot me down in the midst of my people."

The Professor's eyes sparkled; he did not regard hardihood as a blemish. The Red Bull went on:

"To be frank, I personally know little or nothing about him. He lived with the Kiowas for many years. Since then he has roved, hither and yon, between the Mohave Desert and the Panhandle. He pretends to live by buffalo hunting and by cattle."

"Pretends?" repeated Robert.

"I say 'pretends,' because it is a shrewd suspicion that his cattle interests are mainly confined to cattle stealing, and his buffalo hunting only a cover for stage robbing. Understand," concluded the Red Bull earnestly—"understand that personally I know of nothing against this Old Tom Moonlight. I only give you what I have heard."

"That prefix 'Old,'" commented the Professor, "seems out of place."

"A mere pet name of the Panhandle," returned the Red Bull. "In a rough country, a desperado will have admirers. The nickname 'Old' is simply a last note of popular admiration. When you settle fairly down to the cattle trade, however, you must watch this Old Tom Moonlight."

"And why?" This, from Robert.

"He'll steal your calves."

"But the law!"

"The law is always a long way off; you will have to see to your own defense. This Moonlight is an

inveterate cattle thief; he drove off full two hundred head of Don Anton Baca's cattle—Don Anton who is to be here to-night."

"I have some skill in faces," observed the Professor doubtfully, "and I should not have called this young man a thief. Violent, yes, and perhaps bloodthirsty; but not a rascal."

"You have seen him then?"

Professor Doremus related the meeting at the lodge of Ironjacket, passing over that ocular duel.

"Professor Doremus," observed Robert, addressing the Red Bull, "was quite taken with this fellow. For myself, I knew him at once to be some desperate outcast."

"And you were right. My word is to have an eye for him."

"I shall," said Robert. "Tell me more about him."

"There's nothing to add, save that he lives to the south on the Palo Duro. He has two followers, Jeff Horne and Red River Bill, both as trustless as himself. They yield themselves to his will like dogs, and will kill at a nod from him."

"Has he been long in this region?"

"No," returned the Red Bull, thoughtfully, like one reckoning the months; "I should say something over a year. He took up an old deserted 'dobe, that was once a trading-post with the Comanches, and had been abandoned. It is a place well chosen, for it commands the only water within ten miles."

"Of whom did he buy?" asked Robert.

"Buy? He bought of nobody. The place was deserted, and he moved in. Legally, he is no more

than just a squatter. Of course no one complains, as the state of Texas owns the land."

Robert made a mental note. Why would it not be a thrifty bit of strategy to ride back to Austin and purchase the patent to this ancient trading-post on the Palo Duro? He did not voice the query. The Red Bull might take the hint, and act on it for himself. Robert was enough of a lawyer to understand how, once the title was his own, he might dispossess his enemy. The programme appealed to him. It would mean a profit in dollars; it would also spell revenge. The latter was not to be lost sight of; for Robert hated Moonlight as only a coward hates the man before whom he has quailed.

"I may yet teach this fellow his place," he muttered under his breath. "He put his insult upon me. Ethel despises me, even the old musty Doremus despises me, for not flying at his throat. I shall yet show him, and show them, that, even though I have my own methods of retaliation, I am not to be affronted with impunity."

Robert was warming his little soul, and fostering his little vanity, with these reflections when the Red Bull called attention to a party of horsemen approaching from the west.

"Don Anton and his people!" he explained. "Let us return to the ranch-house. Don Anton would feel ill-used if I did not greet him in the very doorway."

The Red Bull smiled as he said this, as though at the childish humors of a spoiled boy, to whose petulant exactions he yielded in a spirit of patronizing good nature. He and Robert turned back, picking up Aunt Tilda and the Professor, who had fallen behind.

While the others made the rounds of the ranch buildings, Ethel and the Doña Inez were swapping confidences. The talk was bound to pivot finally on the coming Don Anton; and it did.

"And when will you marry him?" asked Ethel, for whom, as for other girls, bridals possessed a burning interest.

The Doña Inez spread out her little brown hands in a deprecatory way.

"Not for a long time. There is no hurry."

Ethel was taken aback at the other's lack of ardor. By every rule of love, as studied by her in the romances of the day, the Doña Inez should have been in a tremor of dulcet expectation.

"But—but you love him?" she said tentatively.

"I love him well enough to marry him." To the horror of Ethel, the Doña Inez almost yawned. "That need not be much," she went on. "And as for marriage, we can well wait. I already see that we shall quarrel. We have bad tempers—both of us. Besides, he is eager to be jealous—is Don Anton."

"Jealous? But you give him no cause?"

"No," returned the Doña Inez, ruefully; "as you say, I give him no cause, for there are no men." She waved a despairing hand above the flowers in the *patio*, as though to invite attention to the manless condition of the Panhandle. "But," she concluded, "that will make no difference; Don Anton will just the same be jealous. He will imagine the man."

"You do not seem to care for his jealousy."

Ethel could not solve the cool riddle of her bewitching friend. Never having gone deeper into love than a theory, she had taken it for granted that,

given a jealous lover, the maiden in interest was at once tearfully miserable.

The Doña Inez drew the yellow and black *rebozo* about her oval face, and looked more than ever like an ingenuous small tigress.

"Yes, I care," she said; "I like it." Then, after a moment: "Only I wish there was a man, so that Don Anton should have cause."

"But they might quarrel," Ethel protested. "They might even fight a duel."

"A duel? That would be nice—why not! Fight? It is the right of a man to fight. That is why he's a man."

The Doña Inez threw off this barbarous philosophy as might one who states an axiom.

"It would be good," she added, "if Don Anton would fight about me once—twice—many times. I should love him a little and a little more each time. At last I might love him a great deal—who knows? No, he should not go without reward."

She looked up archly at Ethel through her long black lashes.

"Am I not worth fighting for?" she asked.

Ethel broke into a smile; the Doña Inez accepted the smile affirmatively.

"Now you," she said, giving Ethel a queer, kittenish pat on the cheek, that would have been affectedly silly in any other—"now you are worth fighting for; and worth dying for. That Robert! He is your lover—no?"

Ethel colored to the eyebrows.

"Assuredly not," she returned. "We are not lovers at all. We were reared together; he is my foster-brother."

The Doña Inez shook her little head, as intimating tremendous wisdom.

"For all that he is your lover."

Ethel looked denial.

"Yes, it is not that you love him; I do not say so. But his love is yours. I know; because when I tried to make him look at me he would not. I could not even coax his eyes from you, to say naught of his heart."

Ethel heard the chatter of the Doña Inez lightly, yielding it not a second thought. She supposed—and was right—it to be the other's way of paying compliments. And yet it occurred to her as strange that, while to name Robert as her lover filled her with vague resentful anger, the word brought up not unpleasantly the image of that gray-eyed one left standing beneath the cottonwood. She could not drive his picture from her thoughts; the failure shamed her until a blush burned in her cheek.

"Ah!" cried the observant Doña Inez, triumphing in the blush, "your face is red! You are thinking of your lover now!"

Ethel failed to interpose denial, as she did when Robert was named. Perhaps she forgot. The wicked Doña Inez seized on this weak silence for support.

"You do not say 'no,'" she cried, as though clenching a victory.

There arose sounds of a welcoming confusion. The next moment, followed by the others, the Red Bull came into the *patio* with Don Anton.

Don Anton Baca was not an imposing figure. Slight, dark, with little pointed beard, little pointed mustaches, little, peevish, pointed arrogant face,

pointed Chihuahua hat weighted with bullion and set round with little tinkling bells, velvet jacket and velvet trousers, slashed with silk and sewn thick with little silver buttons, little boots of Cordova leather, with spurs a-jingle, Don Anton, to the mind of Ethel, appeared the personification of all that was little. She glanced at the Doña Inez, being curious as to how the latter would greet her lover. According to those guiding romances, it was a time for flying into his arms.

Nothing of the sort took place; either the Doña Inez had not read those romances, or she disregarded them. She and the little peevish Don Anton greeted one another briefly in monosyllabic Spanish, and the warmth of the meeting was furnished wholly by the worthy Red Bull, whose effulgent face—to do him justice—shone like the sun.

Ethel could not avoid the conclusion that the manner of the lovers, careless to the point of cold, was due to the presence of strangers. Doubtless, the Doña Inez would sweetly thaw, and Don Anton's hard, little eyes—shiny and black like the eyes of a rat—soften into tenderness, under conditions more sweetly lonesome.

However, throughout the evening there arose nothing to justify the thought. Ethel never once intercepted word or look or sigh that told of love. The Doña Inez was the model of a superlative indifference; and the only thing to mark the pair as lovers in the least, was an occasional small sparkle of anger on Don Anton's part at the aloofness of the Doña Inez.

In an extreme instance he even waxed thus acrid. Says he in Spanish:

"One might think us already married!"

"I shall remember that we are not!" says she.

The Doña Inez, yearning for further confidences, drew Ethel aside, leaving Don Anton to such society as Aunt Tilda, Robert, Professor Doremus and the Red Bull afforded.

"You were cruel!" whispered Ethel, who felt some slender sympathies for the rat-eyed Don Anton.

The Doña Inez shrugged her shoulders, and rearranged the tigerish *reboza*.

"You do not understand!" she lisped, the specter of a twinkle in her midnight eyes. "Men are like antelope; the way to hunt them is to sit still."

## CHAPTER IX

### THE UNINVITED GUEST

Unless a feast or a dance be immediately afoot, a community of Mexicans is not a theater of turmoil and mad activities, and the day following our travelers' advent at the Cross-8 was dull enough. Both the Red Bull and the Doña Inez were so far well-bred that they did not annoy their guests by too much attention, but let them dispose of themselves as best suited their fancy. The Doña Inez came ever and anon for a word with Ethel, and to see that she was not dying of solitude. Assured on that point, she was presently back to her own apartments.

The latter young lady for a while pleased herself with the flowers, and the clear spring gurgling in the *patio*. Then she had Cato bring up Jet, and springing to the saddle went for a little gallop. She flattered herself that the little gallop was only resorted to as a means of breaking the slow monotony of the afternoon. It is worth note, however, that in taking it she also took the back-track along the river toward the east. She even extended it to that hill which shut in the Cross-8 from the cottonwood bottoms, where stood the lodge of Ironjacket. Her courage or her curiosity, or whatever attribute more romantic had led her in that direction, carried her no farther.

What if he of the gray eyes were still there? She would not care to come upon him; it might seem indelicate! With these thoughts, which were highly proper, Ethel turned back, her face—and that was the unaccountable thing—a blushing red.

Aunt Tilda was more rationally employed. She busied herself with a thorough investigation of Mexican housewifery as practiced at the Cross-8. The recondite art of housekeeping is vastly at the mercy of an environment, and Aunt Tilda was anxious to study it, in all its length and breadth, under what might be called Panhandle limitations. The lesson was not without its several alarming sides; but Aunt Tilda's courage was upheld by the promise, volunteered by the urbane Red Bull, to give her three of his best women servants as kitchen aides, until such time as the housekeeping at the Bar-Z was founded beyond chance of fall.

"They will not," explained the Red Bull apologetically, "equal as housemaids those to whom you have been used. Moreover, you must drive them, Madam; drive them like dogs!"

Aunt Tilda thanked him, although she feared that in the matter of "driving" she would dismally fail.

Robert expressed himself as impatient to push forward to the Bar-Z. To quiet if not to comfort him, the excellent Red Bull took him down to the ford.

"This is the only ford between here and Tascosa," he explained; "and since the Bar-Z lies north of the river, here you must cross."

The Red Bull ordered one of his Mexicans to take his pony into the ford, and show the depth. Twenty feet from the river's margin the pony slumped, head

and ears, into one of those basin-like holes which are a feature of Western river-beds. The ruffling current was running like a tail-race, and the Mexican—who went loyally under with his pony—was swept from the saddle. Spluttering and splashing, the pony and the Mexican worked their several ways back to the bank.

It was now that Robert was granted a disturbing exhibition of the Red Bull's temper, and began to understand his alias, which had theretofore struck him as slanderous. As the Mexican, all a-drip with water, rode up the slope from the river's edge, the Red Bull, pouring forth a cataract of curses, rushed upon him, and struck him from the saddle. The Mexican rolled along the grass until out of harm's reach and then scrambled to his feet, and fled howling. The frightened pony fled after him, fearing lest it should be his own turn next. For even the ponies knew the Red Bull, and cared not for his company in the hour of his anger.

"Clumsy scoundrel!" cried the indignant Red Bull. "I'll teach him to stick closer to his saddle next time. He might have lost the pony."

The Red Bull's visage, which had become apoplectic, retreated to its normal hue of boiled lobster, and Robert felt relieved. Still, it would have been hard to say which had discouraged him most, the tumultuous river or the even more tumultuous Red Bull. Robert glanced at Don Anton, who was with them, to observe how he viewed the fracas.

Don Anton—delicately puffing a cigarette, his expression one of inane arrogance—prided himself as of the pure blood of Spain. Being of the pure blood,

it did not become him to concern himself about a peon, who is a clod. It mattered nothing to him how violently his Red Bull father-in-law elect manhandled his servitors; and his looks evinced it.

"At any rate," said Robert, replying to the Red Bull's indictment of the unseated one, "he made it clear that the ford is out of the question for to-day."

"For to-day, to-morrow and the next day," returned the Red Bull, again the beaming host in every lineament. "On the fourth day I shall have the ponies brought down from the wire pasture, and straighten up the crossing for you."

Professor Doremus did not go to the river. Since the visual encounter between Moonlight and Robert, he had displayed a diminished anxiety for Robert's society.

"The boy's a coward!" mused the Professor sadly. "He's half a Gordon, too! I wouldn't have believed it!"

The Professor, early in the day, had tried to talk with Don Anton. The inept and brainless young *rico* disappointed him.

"A fop, my dear Madam; a witless wren-head!" was what he told Aunt Tilda, in the wake of that fragment of a conversation. "It is strange how a brilliant girl like the Doña Inez can think twice of such an ass. And yet"—with a reminiscent sigh—"how frequently do the brightest and most beauteous women marry fools!"

The Professor made a foot journey among "the peasantry," for thus he styled the Mexicans of the Cross-8. They bowed to the ground before him; for was he not a "Don"? and hadn't the Red Bull him-

self rode forth to bid him welcome? This Mexican deference uplifted the Professor, who was not insensible to flattery.

He found the Mexicans disposed to make much of Cato in a friendly way. The two American mule-skinners, who drove the six-mule teams for Robert, were lying by their own fire, and managing their own camp affairs. They made an unmuzzled specialty of their contempt for Mexicans, and were at pains to let it be known. The latter kept away from them, in a mixture of hatred and fear. They drew no color line, however, and would have taken Cato to their social bosoms. Cato, for his part, turned a cold shoulder to their polite attentions, and—your true darky never fails to copy the white man—was as surly and repellant as were the teamsters.

Observing this, the Professor was moved to rebuke him.

"They are to be your neighbors, Cato," he said. "You know you are commanded to love your neighbor as yourself."

"Yassir, Professah," returned Cato. "An' I says d' same thing. 'Love your neighbors!' I says; an' then I adds out o' d' Christian caution of my heart: 'But doan't take down your fence!'"

The Doña Inez and Don Anton gave one another not the least attention. This disturbed Ethel; it subtracted from the romance of the thing.

"And I had supposed you a warm, ardent people!" she said to the Doña Inez.

"Warm? Ardent? And so we are—given right occasion."

"And do you not call your betrothal such? The

more I see of you and Don Anton, the less I understand how you became engaged."

"You mean betrothed?" and the Doña Inez settled her feathers demurely. "Ah, yes! That was settled between Don Anton and my father."

"You do not mean that you are compelled to wed Don Anton?"

"Compelled?—the Doña Inez?" The black eyes blazed. "No; there is no one—neither my father nor Don Anton—who would dare employ the word 'compel' where I am concerned. But, my little sister from the East"—here the Doña Inez conferred upon Ethel that queer kittenish tap—"as she says, cannot understand. Let it go; it amounts to naught. Don Anton and I are betrothed, and will some day marry; the *padre* will be paid a big fee; the people will rejoice and dance; my father will be pleased; and I—I shall not care. There, that is enough!"

The Doña Inez tried her black and yellow *reboza* on Ethel to see how it looked.

"Now," said the Doña Inez, with a milliner-like cock to her pretty head, "all you need is a short petticoat, a black velvet bodice, some lace about your throat, and a tortoise-shell comb, to make you a beauty of Old Madrid."

The Mexican is no one to permit his work to interfere with his festivals, and the second day at the Cross-8 took on a livelier color. The projected merrymaking had been given wide-flung advertisement; hospitable word of it had not alone gone up and down the Canadian, but had traveled as far northward as the Cimarron, and as far westward as the Pecos.

With the earliest streaks of dawn the guests began

to gather. Professor Doremus, remembering the empty wilderness through which he had come, marveled at their numbers. The throng all day poured into the cleared space about the ranch-house. They were of every sort and condition; every rank had its representative, and all were welcome. Some were on ponies; some arrived in ancient carriages drawn by sleek, sleepy mules; others came in leather-lined ox-carts, the wheels of which had never heard of wagon-grease, and wailed and shrieked most dolorously; still others rode in on little donkeys, legs dangling to the ground. There were men, women, boys, girls, babes in arms; and these, with the ponies, mules, donkeys, and a legion of dogs made up a checkered spectacle.

The Red Bull was lifted to a topmost pinnacle of satisfaction; for he was never so pleased as when playing the host. He greeted one and all with a cordiality that never wavered. Saint and sinner, high and low, the greasy and the well-clad—he made every one welcome.

As fast as they put in an appearance, little clots and family knots of folk pitched their respective camps. In the end, full five hundred were gathered, and all in their gayest colors. It looked as though some fair or kermess were being held.

The Cross-8 herders drove in fat cattle, and the guests—fires going, kettles boiling—drew their knives for slaughter. They went to the ranch store, and, without money and without price were given tobacco, flour, molasses, coffee, sugar, and goods in tins. It was a season of prodigality and plenty, one calculated to spread abroad the Red Bull's name.

The *sala*, sixty feet by thirty, was to be the ball-

room. All about its whitewashed walls were placed temporary tiers of seats, like those in an amphitheater. These were for the good of ones who by reason of years or gravity did not dance. In a smaller room were wines and mescal and waters even stronger. There were no restrictions; all who would went in and helped themselves. This license was possible with Mexicans, who are considerate drinkers, and tally up their cups with caution.

One feature pleased Professor Doremus; the *sala* and the dependent apartments were lighted by coal-oil lamps. These he regarded as so many entering wedges of civilization, destined at last to split the savage desert and destroy it. He had expected pine-knots and rude torches, or at the best candles of the tallow-dip variety. Wherefore, those coal-oil lamps, with their smoke-smudged chimneys, much upbuoyed his spirits, and became to him as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

The dancing began early; the oldsters with the babies ranged themselves about the walls eating sweetmeats and smoking cigarettes, while the beauty and chivalry crowded the dancing space in the middle. The orchestra—two fiddles, two guitars, and a tin can half-filled with pebbles wherewith to beat out the *tempo*—led by an aged *Guitarero*, had been given honorable elevation on a platform raised at one end of the room. The old *Guitarero*—who for long had been the poet laureate of the Canadian—being stimulated of mescal, as the evening wore on, gave way to vocal outbursts, recitative of the glories and the virtues of our four from old Somerset. Robert was a javelin—a thunderbolt—a very Hector for valor. Pro-

fessor Doremus was, for his wisdom, likened unto a beaver or a bear. Aunt Tilda was exalted as the staid and virtuous matron, ruling all, providing for all. Ethel found description as a song and a sunbeam—the beautiful mother of flowers and dear dreams. The old minstrel sang in Spanish; but the Red Bull was so good as to interpret. Thereupon Robert strutted, Aunt Tilda bridled, Ethel blushed, while the Professor beamed.

The Professor said the old *Guitarero* was a man of genius, and privily bestowed upon him largesse to the extent of a double eagle—yellow and fresh gleaming from the mint. At this the old *Guitarero* became excited, and sang another song, devoted wholly to the Professor, and so far amending mythology as to describe that learned man as a demigod of erudition and Minerva's eldest son.

Don Anton languidly walked the Doña Inez through one dance, carrying her at his finger tips to demonstrate the noble difference between himself and a commoner clay that would have clasped so lovely a partner to its bosom. After this exploit, which was in the nature of a concession to popular desire, Don Anton danced no more. Thereby he preserved for himself, as he would have said, a haughty separation from the dancing herd. As for the Doña Inez, she was quite as well pleased, preferring to sit by Ethel—who did not dance.

The Professor did not go unaffected of the lively scene. The pretty faces laid hold on his fancy. At last, warmed by the music, and perhaps the mescal —which latter he tasted in a scientific spirit in order to inform himself touching the drinks of the country

—he outraged Aunt Tilda by uttering these wild words:

"My dear Madam, I shall join in the next waltz."

"Professor!"

There was a frozen something in Aunt Tilda's tones.

"Not if you object, my dear Madam," murmured the Professor abjectly. "I only thought of doing honor to our worthy host."

"Honor! Dancing at your age, and with a slip of a Mexican girl! Professor!"

Many a poor soul in moment of direst peril has been saved by the unexpected, and so with the guilty Professor. Aunt Tilda was bending upon him a shocked, corrective eye, and plainly meditating a more elaborate reproof, when the attention of both was drawn to their host. A repellant looking Mexican had tiptoed across and whispered something to him in Spanish, the only understandable word being *Americanos*.

The Red Bull arched his bald eyebrows with surprise and dismay. Hastily excusing himself to Aunt Tilda, he left the *sala*. As he did so he gave a half-apprehensive glance toward Don Anton, where that young patrician, puffing a cigarette and looking ineffably bored, stood leaning against the wall.

The lax etiquette of the Panhandle in no wise provided for any peculiar demonstration of either respect or welcome upon the coming of a guest. The *padre* who was present—and a holy man among Mexicans is of much station—had not been granted especial notice. Folk were expected to attend the *baile* without invitation, and leave without farewell; in their coming and staying and going they were to

consult only their own pleasure. That a guest had appeared, to whose reception the host himself must personally attend, was decidedly beyond the common. The wonder of it might be read in the whispered comments and queries that went buzzing from lip to lip.

Expectation was not kept waiting. The Red Bull shortly returned; and with him came Moonlight, followed by Jeff Horne and Red River Bill, the two latter wearing what Jeff would have called their "gala expression."

The Red Bull showed ill at ease, while doing his best to be polite. To relieve what was unmistakably a strain, for all his cheerful fortitude, he made a signal to the old *Guitarero*. That virtuoso replied with the music for a quadrille, by which diplomacy public interest was again set flowing in channels normal. An eager covey of dancers quickly filled the floor.

It required no deep diving beneath the surface to see that the advent of Moonlight had not multiplied the gayety of the company. There was an odd look of timid uncertainty that almost amounted to alarm in every Mexican face. Clearly the newcomers needed no introduction; it stood apparent that they were known and feared. Also, as one might tell by the soft glances of the señoritas, they were objects of shy admiration in certain blooming quarters. Having advantage of this last, Red River at once led forth a damsel to the dance. Thereupon, the damsel thus distinguished waxed blushingly proud, while sundry males among the Mexicans glowered.

Jeff Horne, being above such frivolities as quadrilles, made signs of amity to Professor Doremus, whom he had quickly singled out. These friendly

signals so far won upon the Professor that he joined the sociable Jeff, and presently the pair disappeared in the direction of that room which held the refreshments. During the evening the Professor returned to Aunt Tilda at unsteady intervals, and assured her that his new friend was a remarkable man.

"Mosht remarkable, this Mr. Horne, my dear Madam; mosht remarkable man I ever met!" said the Professor; after which he would again join that interesting individual, and again they would disappear.

Moonlight would in no wise have reminded one of that pensive youth who, self-accusatory and deploring his barbaric manner of life, sat so gloomily on a recent evening over the camp-fire of the Kiowa. So far from regretting, he would seem to have returned to a present existence, and returned with open arms.

His costume was that of a Mexican *rico*, and for an arrogance of splendor would have shamed a peacock. There had been no laying aside of hats at the *baile*, and Moonlight wore his. Its broad brim was even more richly decked of bullion and hawk's bells than was Don Anton's own. About it, in lieu of band, coiled a rattlesnake done in gold filigree, head well down on the hat-brim, two blazing rubies for eyes. His jacket and trousers were of moss-green velvet, the latter slashed below the knee, Spanish fashion, with wine-colored silk, the whole ornamented along the outer seams and caught in at the belt, with clasps and buttons of gold. The jacket, open in front, displayed a ruffle of fine linen. The waist was girt about by a Colt's-45 pistol, and a nine-inch bowie knife;

the belt, scabbard, and holster that upheld knife and pistol being of green leather to match the green velvet of coat and trousers. Half covering the belt and the cartridges which corrugated it, was a thick sash, wine-color like the silk slashings of the trousers. On the heels of the Mexican boots jingled great spurs of silver and wrought steel.

Ethel regarded him with emotions sadly mixed. The velvet costume set off his broad shoulders, deep chest, slim waist and narrow hips to advantage, and she felt rather than confessed that she had never beheld a handsomer figure.

And yet there was that about him which frightened while it drew her forward. His attitude was one of rudest challenge as though a cock had crowed. There was nothing of refinement, nothing of vulgarity, as she understood the words. If anything there was a super-refined savagery. It was like an insufferable but honest bragging. His defying glances roved from face to face. There was no modesty; all was aggression; he seemed to swell with a sublime insolence that fairly filled the room.

Never once did he speak to a man; it was as though they were below contempt. But he had word and smile for every pretty face, and all with the manner of a master. So dangerous was the impression which he threw off that, wherever he went—and he was constantly moving about—the men shrunk away from him as though daunted. And so he continued, a living, breathing, boasting insult in green velvet, and studied to be so. His glance taunted, his expression sneered.

Ethel sat in a daze of angry admiration. She felt

that if she were a man she would hate him, and war with him to the death. And, while she was so fired with anger in the subjunctive, her swimming eye and quick beating heart told her that she was not a man but a woman. She shot a resentful look at Robert. His gaze was on the floor, and in his cheek—she thought it showed a pallor—something beat like a pulse. Over across, Don Anton was contemplating his slim fingers, striving to seem at ease; and all the while his beady eyes burned with a rat-anger of mingled rage and fear. And so this savage in green velvet swaggered and swelled and strutted and challenged unchecked. No one stood forward; it was as though he threw down a glove, and none lifted it.

Ethel was caught up in an eddy of desperation. She tried many times to despise him; but it always ended in contempt for those others. Every man who owned one was wearing a pistol; and Ethel —who had slipped more into the spirit of the region than she would have been ready to admit—found herself indignantly wondering, in view of a present backwardness, by what masculine right they carried such stern embellishments. Professor Doremus was nowhere to be seen, being indeed in the refreshment room in weighty confab over Panhandle questions and things with the not to be too much admired Jeff. Of all within reach, Ethel was driven to yield most respect to their host; who, while in an evident perspiration, seemed best to maintain erect his manhood before this swash-buckler.

"They are all afraid! Bah!"

Ethel gave a start. It was the lisping voice of the Doña Inez; and yet, soft as were the tones, such was

the tension of Ethel's drawn nerves that they struck upon her ear like the booming of a great bell.

The Doña Inez arose, and stepped down among the dancers. She said a sharp word in Spanish; the music ceased, and the dancers quitted the floor.

The orchestra now broke into a Spanish dance that rose and fell and swelled and died away in an abandon of passion. The Doña Inez appeared to melt into the motion and the rhythm of that dance; it was as though she became a part of the music. At first slow and dreamy, soon her steps took on the spring and fire of a panther. Ethel watched her in a rapt way as if locked in a trance.

The Doña Inez whirled by Don Anton. As she passed she whipped off his wide hat, and jauntily fitted it to her own little head. She floated across to the masterful one in green. Then she wooed him with body and arms and languishing eyes.

The old *Guitarero* began to sing. Never had he been so eloquent, never flowed his verse so free, as now when he chanted the loveliness of the Doña Inez and the gallantry of her selected cavalier. The company, with parted lips, looked on, while the two swept through the dance. There were cries of admiration, as the Doña Inez approached, retreated, repelled or surrendered. There was a swirl and a sway to it that swallowed up the senses of the onlookers. When it was ended, one wondered if it were not a vision that had come and gone. The music closed with a crash that seemed to threaten every string of the old *Guitarero*. And then, for a last tableau, there was the green masterful one on his knee, with the little hand of the Doña Inez to his

lips. Panting and fire-eyed, the Doña Inez spoke a word or two in soft Spanish. He led her to her seat, bowed low with hat sweeping the ground, and backed from her as from a queen.

Flushed of cheek, and still breathing short and deep, the Doña Inez turned to Ethel.

"Is he not magnificent!" she said. Then with a comprehensive glance of scorn that took in the entire *sala:* "They fear him! See how small they become in his presence!"

Ethel made no reply. There was a soreness in her heart to which she could have given no name, and she had begun to hate the Doña Inez. She lifted her eyes for another look at the arrogant one in green. Something caught in her throat like a sob; he was nowhere to be seen. While she listened to the Doña Inez he had vanished.

The Doña Inez laughed a teasing little laugh.

"Ah!" she whispered, "it is he who is the lover! Don't sigh; you shall see him to-morrow at the roping."

Ethel colored to her small ears; but somewhere, somehow, there lurked comfort in the words of the Doña Inez.

While the arrogant green one and the Doña Inez went circling and swaying through the dance, Don Anton, pale as paper in spite of his swarthy skin, stood gnawing his mustache and wrathfully plucking his little pointed beard. He beckoned to his side a hang-dog murderous creature, whose ugly, half-Indian face had been rendered uglier by a puckering lance scar in the left cheek. Don Anton said something under his breath that sounded like the hissing

of a serpent. The other shrugged his shoulders, and turned his palms outward and upward in shuffling remonstrance.

"What!" smiled Don Anton; "must I feed such dogs as you a year to have you fail me for a day? Is it now that you grow sick at a thought of blood —you who call yourself Pedro of the Knife?"

The murderous lance-scarred Pedro whined ferociously.

"To-morrow!" he pleaded. "It cannot be done now! Is Don Anton blind?"

He gave a directing nod. There, squarely across, stood Jeff Horne and Red River Bill, watchful as ferrets, guarding the perilous gallantries of their young chief. Even as Don Anton looked their steady eyes were upon him.

"Do you not see, Señor?" whispered Pedro of the Knife. "Let us but move an eyelash, and we are dead men. Those gringoes will slay us both."

## CHAPTER X

### THE KNIFE OF DON ANTON

THERE was a deal of riding and jubilant rushing about at the Cross-8, on the day following the *baile*. That roping and bronco riding tournament, for Don Anton's Chihuahua saddle, was to occur, and the contestants were making busy preparations. Since the competitors did not number more than a dozen there would be interested scores to look on. This last argued a spirited exhibition. It is required that men's vanity be addressed, if one would secure their best effort, whether of business or play, and that is done only through a full grandstand. Humanity becomes exceeding listless when acting under no eye and inspired of no approval save its own.

The riding and steer-throwing was to take place on a flat grassy space of perhaps ten acres. The ground was marked off by men on ponies, who busied themselves in riding its boundaries, while those who were to be onlookers fringed it about like a fence. Three gray Mexicans, past-masters of rope and saddle when the oldest among those who would compete was being carried in his mother's arms, had been told off by the Red Bull to serve as judges.

The tournament was not to begin until the judges signaled; meanwhile the assembled Mexicans, afoot with the first of the sun, lounged about after their

own private tastes and inclinations. The older ones gave themselves up to talk; for Mexicans are as conversational as bluejays.

Old crones, equipped of cooking kits, which they carried packed upon burros, opened impromptu restaurants, the basis being a little fire kindled upon the grass, and proceeded to dispense *frijoles*, and *tortillas*, and whatever else in the way of viands could be manufactured from such raw materials as green and red peppers, beef, beans and cornmeal. The Mexican is one to whom stated hours for meals is of as much unimportance as they are to a blanket Indian, and like the Indian he is always hungry.

Professor Doremus was prominent among the patrons of the old crone cooks. Pleased with everything, and beset by an anxiety for information that cannot be too highly extolled, he became indefatigable in his attempts to acquire the recondite art of using a *tortilla* as a spoon—an art that includes devouring the spoon together with the soupy freight of *frijoles* which one has scooped up.

Aunt Tilda was not altogether pleased with these amiable alacrities on the part of her old friend to enter into the simple manners of the Mexicans, holding such to be an unbending, and to one side of what paths his years and dignity should tread. And yet in general she permitted them unrebuked, only once drawing the line. The last occurred when a cockfight was on the carpet.

Many of the younger Mexicans, and others who were not so young, with a forethoughtful eye to the possibilities, had brought their game cocks. Matches were made and wagers laid, and a breathless circle

ringed the quarrelsome birds about. As indicating a certain advance in civilization, it should be observed that the steel gaffs wherewith the birds were heeled were "drop-sockets" of the most modern patterns. Also, as the feathered fighters flew at one another, those who laid wagers—a Mexican takes his religion into everything—told their beads and rattled off whispered prayers for the success of their favorites.

It was when the Professor, whose faraway youth had not gone uncomforted of cock-fighting, showed signs of granting his personal countenance to one of these duels, that Aunt Tilda set down her foot.

"You shall not do it, Professor!" she cried. "Really! you grow worse with time. Last night you would have disgraced yourself by dancing, actually dancing with a chit of a girl; and now you seek to descend still lower, and witness these brutal pastimes. You shall not do it!"

The Professor was sensibly abashed; but the coming "buckle" was to be between a duck-wing and a red shawl-neck, strains whereof the Professor had for long maintained a mixed though high opinion. This moved him to mildly contest the point. In a gingerly way he called Aunt Tilda's attention to the reverend *padre*, who was not only prepared to be a spectator of the battle, but, in sober truth, was the owner of the duck-wing. Certainly, a layman could not go far astray while following so holy an example. Moreover—as the Professor ingeniously suggested—the cocks liked it.

"It is not, my dear Madam," urged the Professor timidly, "the same as chasing a terrified fox or butch-

ering an unfortunate quail. The cocks are never more happy. They but express their nature; and indeed it has often been subject of doubt with me as to how far we should go in stigmatizing as brutal anything that is natural."

Aunt Tilda proved adamant.

"I refuse to disgrace myself by discussing it," she said, and taking the Professor's reluctant arm, she led him to a more innocent corner of the field.

The Doña Inez and Ethel moved slowly from one group to another. Ethel could not understand the chatter, but the liveliness of the scene and the many colored dresses appealed to her. At times she could not refrain from casting here and there a furtive glance, as though looking for one not yet come. Once she even sighed.

"He will come," whispered the Doña Inez, as though replying to the sigh; "you need have no fears. The contests are not yet ready."

Ethel appeared to understand.

"Had you met him before last evening?" Ethel asked, trying to show unconcern. "Do you know him?"

"I know *of* him," returned the Doña Inez composedly. "My father has often spoken of him. He is no friend of ours, and has driven off Don Anton's cattle."

"If that be so," returned Ethel, bewildered by what the Doña Inez said and the remembrance of that whirling, swaying, breath-stealing dance—"if that be so, I cannot understand how you would dance with him."

"As to that," responded the Doña Inez carelessly,

"the coming of this Señor Moonlight to our house was a challenge. He meant it to be such; and you, yourself, beheld how they fell away before him like sheep. Don Anton understood; I danced with him to do him honor. He had braved our men; he was entitled to our women. I could do no less than reward him with the submission of that dance. It was his right."

Ethel made no reply; the queer social logic of the dark, half-savage beauty in its bizarre fantasticism was beyond the grasp of her more civilized comprehension. The two were silent for a moment; then the Doña Inez plucked Ethel by the sleeve.

"There he is for whom you wait," she whispered, with just the color of mockery in her manner. "He comes early."

On the far side of the field, ponies at a walk, were riding the enigmatical Moonlight and his adherents, Jeff Horne and Red River Bill. They swung to the ground, and lifting the reins over their ponies' heads, left them to graze. Naturalists do not account for it, but—bridled and saddled—a mustang will stand for a week as though tied to a post, if the rider upon dismounting but throw the bridle-reins upon the ground.

Moonlight and his companions made no motion to cross to where the Doña Inez and Ethel were standing, full forty rods away. Near where they dismounted, Frosty, that Tascosa courtier of fortune mentioned by Jeff, was offering to engage all comers at the game, so fascinating to Mexicans, called monte.

"What's your limit?" asked Moonlight.

"The limit?" repeated Frosty—"the limit, Cap-

tain, is the blue dome above." Then he added: "I'd be ashamed to talk of limits to this band of Mexican pikers."

Moonlight did not take extravagant advantage of the reckless Frosty's liberality, but restricted himself in the measure of his bets. Red River Bill, with whom gambling was a passion second only to that of dancing, also put down a moderate stake or two. Fortune ran evenly, and neither Moonlight nor Red River at any time was far ahead or far behind.

While the two were thus engaged, Don Anton rode up to the Doña Inez and Ethel. He was in a most affable mood, and nothing could have been more blandly courteous than were his greetings. The Doña Inez, apparently, was willing to cloud his brow, for she at once drew his attention—with a word in Spanish into which a taunt was flung—to the hated Moonlight.

"The brave ever love the brave," said the Doña Inez mockingly, "and so, Don Anton, I show you that Captain Moonlight. You saw him dance last night. Was he not superb? Did lady ever have a more gallant partner?"

This was said in Spanish, but Ethel gained a close guess at its meaning, for there came a white, angry flash of teeth behind Don Anton's inky mustache. A frown like thunder darkened his brow.

"Yes," said the Doña Inez, "it is safe to scowl at this distance."

Don Anton, with a gesture of rage, threw himself on his pony and spurred away.

"He goes for his Pedro of the Knife," observed the Doña Inez, looking after the disappearing figure

of her betrothed. Then, with a mixture of complaint and contempt, she continued: "Will he never summon the manhood to do his own killing!"

The dark inference of the words would have alarmed Ethel, if she had even in part understood; but in what she said, as well as in what she did, the Doña Inez was an unsolved enigma. If, however, Don Anton had gone for Pedro of the Knife, there arose no disturbing evidence of it. Perhaps the Doña Inez was in error.

While Moonlight and Red River gave their energies to monte, Jeff Horne, although seemingly an absorbed spectator of the play, maintained a close watch upon the assembled Mexicans. Not that he looked for trouble; but he was a careful man, and had lived long on the sunset side of the Missouri.

"It would shore mortify me to death," said he, explaining his vigilance to Frosty, "if I let a passel of black an' tans, like them Cross-8 Mexicans, open a game on me onexpected."

No one attempted to open any game; and the gossiping, the gambling, the cock-fighting, the galloping of ponies and the consumption of *tortillas* and *frijoles* with a blue cloud of cigarette smoke over all persisted undisturbed.

The three gray judges rode slowly into the center of the field. One of them made brief proclamation in Spanish. It was in effect a terse announcement of the programme, coupled with an enumeration of the prizes and an exhortation to the boundary riders to keep the ground. The latter at this, feeling upon them the eyes of the public, spurred furiously along the lines. These demonstrations of zeal and horse-

manship added an *eclat* to the scene to be arrived at in no other way.

The judges, having formally opened the lists, summoned the competitors, who came forward carrying bridles and heavy double-cinch saddles on their arms. The bridles were armed with cruel Spanish bits which, under the pressure of a weakest hand, would break the jaw of a pony. A band of unbroken mustangs, creatures that had never tasted bit nor felt the straining cinch, were driven up by the horse-hustlers.

The old chief judge called: "Maurice Miguel!"

At the word, a lithe, springy young fellow, legs bowed like compasses, stepped quickly forth with that waddling gait which professional riders affect. Throwing his saddle on the ground, he unslung his lariat. Whirling the loop about his head, he sent it curling for the fore feet of a vicious claybank, to which the judges pointed. The pony was thrown and blindfolded. As it lay sprawling, one Mexican secured its head while another subdued the hind legs. Bridle and saddle were fitted to the pony as it lay stretched—it was fairly rolled into the saddle—and eyes still bandaged, it was then allowed to scramble to its feet. Once there it stood and shivered, overcome by novel and alarming sensations.

The dark young Mexican was in the saddle like a flash. Picking up the bridle-reins, he shoved his feet into the wooden stirrups as deeply as heel and instep would allow. An attendant Mexican whipped the bandage from the bronco's eyes, the rider drove his spurs into its flanks, and the combat between pony and man began.

It was the merest madness of tumult—a whirlwind

of buck and pitch and toss. Then the pony suddenly turned sullen, like a balky mule, and no application of bit or spur or quirt would budge him. At the end of ten minutes, the judges ordered the rider from the saddle. He had not been thrown, but his failure to move the pony out of that stolid balk was marked against him.

Affairs progressed rapidly. One after another the ponies were roped, thrown, saddled and mounted. The riders had varying luck, while the ponies displayed a variety of antics, not to say tactics, contingent in each instance on the spirit and intelligence of the pony. Some sulked; while others sunfished about—nose down, back arched—in a manner to evoke wildest applause. Now and again the rider was thrown or jolted off, and sent rolling—clawing and clutching at the short grass. In these mishaps abode the comedy element; and, although one broke his collar bone and another his arm, while all were bruised, the spectators failed not to laugh uproariously. The discomfited ones arose to their feet with grins—some sickly, some sincere—and he of the broken arm even made it a point to laugh, as he was supported from the field.

The Professor followed him, having some skill in surgery, thinking to be of use. He opened his eyes in amazement, almost in horror, when the splintered arm was coolly set by the sufferer's mates of the cow-camps, who supported their unauthorized splicings by rude splints made from the staves of a flour barrel, and bandages torn from a blanket.

"It's all right, Professor," said the Red Bull cheerfully. The outraged Professor had expressed

doubts as to the upcome of such empiricism. "It's all right! That arm will emerge from those barrel staves as straight as a gun."

The old Mexican who served as chief of the judges rode up to the Red Bull, his face wearing a shocked expression. With a courtly bow he began:

"The señor sees the young gringo," said he, pointing his age-shaken finger at Moonlight. "He is most insulting! He declares the riding a farce, and says that an infant could have conquered the worst among the ponies. More, señor, he called us sheep-herders!" The old Mexican's eyes flashed at the outrage of such an epithet. "Also, he demands that he be allowed to compete."

The Red Bull looked at Don Anton, who had approached.

"By all means!" cried Don Anton. "Give him Sathanthus—the mad stallion that killed Juan. It may be that Sathanthus will rid us of this fellow, and make the errand upon which I've dispatched Pedro of the Knife a bootless one."

"Tell him," said the Red Bull to the old Mexican, "that he shall have his way. Say that the Cross-8 men will be glad to learn horsemanship from so finished a rider."

The old Mexican bowed, and paced soberly back in quest of the insolent Moonlight. That young gentleman, mounted on President, had forced his way into the open space, the patrolling boundary keepers not caring to halt him. While waiting the return of the old Mexican, he killed time by putting President through certain astonishing paces, not the least marvelous being to dash ahead at top-speed and then,

without checking, wheel squarely about and dash the other way. It was a feat that required the seat of a centaur, and, for President, the sure foot of a goat.

The personification of vanity, Moonlight rode by the Doña Inez and Ethel with the swiftness of a thrown lance. The Doña Inez applauded, while Ethel's eyes shone. He had been graceful in the dance; he was tenfold more carelessly graceful in the saddle.

The Doña Inez whisked off the handkerchief thrown loosely about Ethel's throat, and tossed it on the grass. As he flashed by, he bent from the saddle, swept up the scrap of silk, and tied it about his own throat.

Ethel's face burned at this piece of assurance. How dare he appropriate her handkerchief! And yet her anger did not seem unbounded; she even smiled in a shadowy way. Perhaps he believed it the property of the Doña Inez! Strange to relate, this thought did not comfort her. He had done wrong in thus riding away with her property; still, having done so, she preferred that he understand it to be hers.

Observing the old Mexican returning, Moonlight turned to meet him.

"You are, by favor of Don Anton and Señor Ruggles, to compete," said the old Mexican sourly.

Moonlight cantered down to where Jeff Horne and Red River Bill were standing by their saddled ponies. Throwing himself from President, he fastened that animal's fore fetlocks together with his rawhide hobbles. This was not to keep President from straying away, rather it was to prevent him from making his way to the coming scene of contest, for he would follow his master about like a collie dog. Having hob-

bled President, he stripped off saddle and bridle, and returned with them on foot to the trial grounds.

Red River Bill followed his young chief. A Mexican led up a buckskin stallion. It came tamely enough; but the eye, like a coal of fire, and the evil slant to the ears, showed the tameness to be a sham. The buckskin was Sathanthus, the fiend of the Cross-8, and in his present quietude he but bided his vicious time. He had killed one man, he hoped to get a chance to kill another; for Sathanthus was well-named, being a born devil in his heart.

Sathanthus must have been sorely disturbed by the rough rapidity with which events began to chase each other through his destinies. Moonlight had brought his lariat; he sent the loop tangling about the ugly buckskin's feet. Then, planting his sharp boot-heels deeply in the sod, he sent that astonished animal crashing upon his side. In a moment Sathanthus was blindfolded, bridled, bitted, saddled and cinched; and next the confining loop about the fore-feet was thrown free.

As the buckskin struggled to his enraged feet, still blindfolded, he was made aware of a man on his back. At this, his wicked heart filled up for murder. He made a savage snap for the rider's left leg, and was caught up short by the Spanish bit.

In his rage, Sathanthus threw himself over backward. He hoped to catch and crush his rider; for it was thus he had slain Juan. Moonlight, more active or more watchful, was out of the saddle and safely on his feet when the wrathful Sathanthus lay rolling. A sharp jerk at the bits helped him to realize his defeat, and brought him again to his four hoofs.

*Threw the bridle rein on Sathanthus' neck, and rolled and lighted a cigarette.*

Instantly Moonlight was back in the stirrups for a second time, while Sathanthus stood panting. That fall had shaken his courage; he would defer further hostilities until the bandage was removed from his wicked red eyes.

Sathanthus, blind, feet planted, heart on fire, stood like a statue. Moonlight held up two silver dollars before those looking on. He placed them between his knees and the saddle-flaps—one under each knee. Then the obscuring bandage was whipped off.

Sathanthus winked and blinked, and shook his sinful head. A stinging cut of the two-thonged quirt, which Moonlight wore looped to his right wrist, and a lancing dig of the spurs, brought him to his senses. Following one wild skyward leap, the result of pain rather than design, the buckskin devoted himself to unseating his enemy. Once were he to have him on the ground, he could strike with his fore feet, or crush with his knees, or tear with his teeth! But first he must hurl him from the saddle.

Sathanthus rushed straight forward like a shot; then he stopped dead, as though he had met a stone wall. Again a forward plunge, followed by a plunge at right angles. These of no avail, and the foe still firm in the saddle, he arched his back like a greyhound, put his muzzle between his knees, and broke into a stiff-legged up and down see-saw, now to the right, now to the left—a paroxysm of old-fashioned genuine, heartfelt, worm-fence bucking. Moonlight threw the bridle-reins on Sathanthus' neck and, searching forth a cornhusk wrapper, rolled and lighted a cigarette. At this feat the onlookers howled their plaudits.

When Sathanthus, exhausted by his hard work, began to falter, Moonlight cured his flagging energies with quirt and spur. This treatment broke the hard, wicked heart of Sathanthus. Head drooping, flank quivering, shaking in knee and hock, he stood the beaten figure of defeat.

Moonlight leaped from the saddle; as he did so the two silver dollars fell clattering to the ground. At this incontestable evidence of the sureness of his riding, the crowd renewed its admiring tumult. With a twist of the wrist he stripped bridle and saddle from the broken-hearted mankiller, and gave them to Red River Bill.

"He did not kill him!" said Don Anton, his tones vibrant of disappointment.

"No," returned the Red Bull, disgusted rather than disappointed, "he did not kill him, although there were moments when I feared he would. There has never been such riding on the Canadian!"

Don Anton and his father-in-law-to-be, misunderstood one another; the former had hoped for the death of Moonlight, while the Red Bull only feared for the life of Sathanthus.

"I could love such a man!" whispered the Doña Inez to Ethel.

Ethel shot a reproachful look.

"Have no fear," observed the Doña Inez, with a teasing shrug; "I give you my promise the other way. I do not fancy loving where I should not be loved."

Moonlight strolled across to Don Anton and the Red Bull. His manner, brusque, supercilious, was only saved from being impertinent by the respectable danger that dwelt in him. For that same reason

of danger, while it escaped being impertinent, it was doubly an insult. He began without salutation.

"The judges," said he, addressing the Red Bull, "have given the riding to me. I shall now compete in the steer-tying; and, since I think them no better at the roping than at the riding, I offer a handicap in favor of your Cross-8 bunglers. Let the best among them tie down his five steers; I will then tie down my five in half the time, or lose. I think, *Amigo,* I shall take your Chihuahua saddle back with me to the Palo Duro."

The last was to Don Anton.

"You have set your heart on that saddle, Señor Moonlight," returned Don Anton, with as nearly the ghost of a sneer as he cared to risk.

"Not for myself; I would not disgrace the back of my pony with a saddle from such a source. No, I shall give it to my man, Red River. He takes care of my cattle."

"Cattle?" repeated the Red Bull, pretending surprise. "I thought you a robe-hunter. I did not know you were in the cattle trade; I've never heard of you in our Panhandle round-ups."

"Nor are you likely to," responded Moonlight, giving his words the twist of sarcasm. "I am, as you surmised a robe hunter; in the cattle trade, as you call it, by accident, and merely to the extent of two hundred head. Some thieving Mexicans stole and destroyed two hundred of my robes, and I took two hundred of their cattle"—here he looked at Don Anton who was twisting his mustache—"to pay for them."

The Red Bull hastened to cut short a conversation

that might graduate from the unpleasant into the disastrous.

"I am glad you will take part in the steer-tying," he said politely. "But, poor hands as the Cross-8 people are, the contest must be on even terms."

"I do not see your pet assassin, Pedro of the Knife," observed Moonlight, again turning to Don Anton. "Have you sent him on some mission of scalps?"

"Why?" returned Don Anton, growing a trifle white. "Would you like to see my Pedro of the Knife?"

"I should like better to see you." Then, with a sudden cold frown: "You wear pistol and knife!"

The Red Bull took Don Anton by the arm and led him aside, the latter, offering no mighty resistance. Moonlight, with an evil smile that set his face like a threat, wheeled on his heel, and returned to where Jeff Horne and Red River Bill had completed the saddling and bridling of President for the roping.

The judges ordained that Moonlight should begin the steer-tying. Ten wild-eyed longhorns were driven upon the field, and held bunched by a couple of herders. Moonlight sat in the saddle one hundred feet away, that being the distance allowed the steers at the start. President, on whom so much depended, was ablaze with excitement; he knew the game as thoroughly as any looking on.

The gray chief of the judges gave the signal to be ready; Moonlight, rope in hand, nodded.

"*Vamos!*" cried the old judge.

President shot forward like an arrow; the herders drew back, and the steers finding all free broke and

ran. President was instantly upon them! Out flew the loop of the lariat, to settle about the spreading horns of the hindmost steer. President stopped short, set all four hoofs; the steer ran out on the rope. President, trained to the work, met the shock—braced and leaning against it; and the steer, in Panhandle parlance, "swapped ends with itself." It struck the grass with a crash, and lay stunned.

In a twinkling, Moonlight was on the ground. The next moment he had pulled a fore and a hind foot of the prostrate steer together, whipped a "tie" about them, and fastened it with three turns and a knot, President meanwhile pulling on the taut rope, as a reason for the steer lying quietly stretched.

The tie-down made, Moonlight whistled, and President ran toward him, full speed. With a shake of the left hand Moonlight freed the loop from the steer's horns, and seizing the saddle-horn with the right hand as President shot by, swung with one motion to the saddle. Away went President in hot pursuit of the flying ones, leaving the tied victim on the ground. And the time of that first tying was just twenty seconds by a stop-watch!

As President tore forward after the little band of terrified steers, Moonlight gathered up his rope. Again the wide loop went whirling; again it settled over the flying horns; again the braced feet of President; again the shock as the rope tightened; again the stunning crash of the thrown steer! And so the work of roping, throwing, tying, and recovering went forward. As Moonlight arose from the fifth steer, and held up his hand as showing his labors done, the watch marked two minutes and twenty-five

seconds, being the whole time consumed—an average of twenty-nine seconds to a steer.

The wonder-smitten Mexicans drew a long breath; it was the sharpest roping and tying they had ever witnessed. Now it was over, they looked at man and pony, and piously crossed themselves; they thought it witchcraft. They had, too, as an argument for their theory of witchcraft, that the quickest of the twelve contestants who followed was five minutes and ten seconds in tying down his fifth steer. To the chagrin of Don Anton, that embossed, stamped-leather, Chihuahua saddle, with the bridle that kept it company, became parcel of the goods and chattels of Red River Bill.

It was two hours later; the field was nearly deserted. Moonlight, who desired word with that estimable gambler, had lingered for a talk with Frosty, before spurring finally away for the Palo Duro. Jeff Horne and Red River Bill, bearing with them the Chihuahua saddle, had already departed.

It was while Moonlight talked with Frosty that the unexpected occurred. It came in the guise of Don Anton, who was seen sauntering toward them in a matter-of-fact way. This of itself was enough to arouse suspicion.

Moonlight saw him coming with the tail of his eye, and while he continued to converse with Frosty he watched Don Anton. For all that gentleman tried to appear at ease, the young *rico's* face was troubled. Also he was over-white, for rage lay at his heart's roots.

"Have you said good-bye to Señor Moonlight?" the Doña Inez had whispered. "No?" Then, with

manner unmistakable: "You are negligent, Don Anton, I should not let him go without good-bye. If you do, I shall not care to see you again. Who would have a husband so grossly impolite?"

There was a resolution as of ice in the steady gaze of Doña Inez. Don Anton must redeem himself or his hopes of her were lost. It did not suit him to lose her. Stung by her air as much as by her words he found courage to go in quest of the dangerous Moonlight. At that he owned no plan, possessed no least inkling of what should be his course.

Of a sudden, when Don Anton had come within talking distance of the hated one, he was flooded of a great thought. It broke upon him like an inspiration; his way stood open. He might yet go back to the Doña Inez with the redeeming blood of Moonlight on his hands.

As nearly as he could—and he was no mean actor—Don Anton forced his tawny features to a pleasant expression.

"Still here, Señor Moonlight?" he said, in a manner of affable surprise. Moonlight's gray eyes became jade as they looked squarely into the shifty rat-eyes of Don Anton. The latter talked on hurriedly; he must get through, or his nerve would fail him. "There is something I should say to you, Señor Moonlight. You spoke of my wearing a pistol. I did not answer, for it was no good time. Now may prove a better. But before I reply, I should like to see you shoot. You are not afraid to let me see you shoot?" he concluded with a sneer.

Moonlight looked through and through him, as though searching his uttermost corner of thought.

Then, apparently satisfied, he took his rifle from its saddle-scabbard—it being part of the furniture of President, now when he stood saddled for the trail. The weapon was a heavy, eight-square single-shot Sharp's—a fifty-caliber buffalo gun.

Moonlight's glances roved about the scene. Two hundred yards away, a huge raven went heavily flapping down the wind. He brought the big rifle to his shoulder. There was a moment's pause as his eye traced the sights. Then came the roar of the gun. A handful of black feathers floated to leeward, while the great raven, shot through and through, went plunging downward to strike the grass with a muffled thump.

Don Anton licked his dry lips nervously.

"Wonderful!" he cried. "That one would be mad who met you with rifles! And are you as sure with the pistol?"

Still without word, Moonlight took six chips from the monte paraphernalia of Frosty. Riffling the ivory counters between thumb and finger, he flirted them fifty feet in the air. They fell apart one from the other, and hung for a moment six dull blue polka-dots, as large as half-dollar pieces, against the brightness of the sky. Like a flash his hand sought his pistol. There came a series of sharp barking reports, so closely set together that each seemed blended with the one that went before. Five of the blue disks were shattered; the sixth fell untouched.

When the fusilade began, Don Anton's tremulous hand began to creep toward his own weapon. As the last shot rang out he had half drawn it from the scabbard—murder showing in his black eyes. His

plan lay all bare in a moment; it was his scheme to empty the weapons of Moonlight. Then, when the other was defenseless, he would slay him.

It was a brilliant plan, a hopeful plan; but it failed. As the sixth unshattered chip fell to the ground, Moonlight wheeled on Don Anton, the somber muzzle covering his fluttering heart.

Don Anton gasped with terror; that sixth cartridge, all unexploded, still slept in its proper chamber. Would this inveterate gray-eyed one slaughter him where he stood! His life was forfeit by every rule; his pistol, half out of its scabbard, convicted him!

"Caught with the goods!" cried Frosty.

Moonlight did not fire, but contented himself with covering Don Anton with the muzzle that never missed. It was a moment of terror for the latter; he tasted death a hundred times.

Moonlight let down the hammer of his pistol, and returned it to his belt.

"Get his gun!" he said to Frosty.

"Why didn't you bump him off, Captain?" asked Frosty in an injured tone, as he gathered in Don Anton's pistol. The poisonous little *rico* stood transfixed with fear, offering no resistance. "It's plumb wrong! You ought to have beefed him!"

"The better revenge is to let him live. He will now die each day through fear."

Suddenly, Don Anton, in a frenzy of fright and rage, plucked his knife from its sheath; the careless Frosty had overlooked the cutlery. Like some sinister ray of light, the heavy blade came glancing through the air! It whizzed by Moonlight's cheek like a giant hornet.

Then befell a miracle. As the knife flew by, Moonlight caught it by the buckhorn haft. In one motion he sent it point-blank at Don Anton with the vengeful force of a javelin. It was done in so brief a space that Frosty did not have time to sing out. The big knife buried itself to the guard in the shrinking shoulder of Don Anton. He plucked at it spasmodically; then with a shriek he sank fainting upon the grass.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE MISSION OF PEDRO OF THE KNIFE

"Good shot!" cried Frosty, in high approval. "Only if you'd held two inches higher an' a leetle more to the right, it would have been a better one. Then you'd have nailed him through the neck."

Moonlight snapped a fresh cartridge into the big Sharp's, and then busied himself with reloading those five empty chambers of his six-shooter.

Two Mexicans, soberly timid, air deprecatory, and with never word nor look, hurried up. They bore Don Anton into the ranch-house; the latter, face the color of tobacco ashes, still lay in a stupor.

Moonlight mounted President.

"Which you don't aim," remonstrated Frosty, "to go challengin' the whole Cross-8 outfit? I wouldn't do it, Captain; some of them greasers inside might pot you."

"There are no windows," replied Moonlight; "and if one tried a shot from the roof, the chances are I'd pot him."

Disregarding the cautious Frosty's counsel, he cantered around to the Cross-8 front door. The Red Bull came out, almost obsequious in his politeness. His face had lost something of its normal purple; the Red Bull was not quite so red.

"It was a fair exchange," said he, forcing a smile. Then, as though to settle his own position in favor of peace, he added: "I never interfere where all is fair."

"No one cares whether you interfere or no," retorted Moonlight, with scant courtesy. "I come now to leave word for your dog of a would-be son-in-law that hereafter I shall kill him on sight. He and his might better visit me on the Palo Duro. The more, since if they do not and I get lonesome, I may come hunting their company on the Concha. Tell him that."

Ethel heard first of that thrown knife from the Doña Inez. It set her heart a-flutter; her cheek was stricken cold. The Doña Inez only readjusted her *reboza* in a satisfied way.

"I am glad he has a little courage," said she. "At least he must have faced this Señor Moonlight. You, my friend, are fortunate in loving a brave man!"

Ethel's face went from white to crimson.

"How can you say that? I've never exchanged a word with him."

The black eyes of the Doña Inez sparkled.

"That will come soon enough. And when it does you must beware. What! With your Robert and this knife-throwing cavalier both in love with you, do you think there will be no clash?"

Ethel said nothing; she felt heart-convicted of a feeling beyond what should become a modest maid toward the gray-eyed overbearing one. Also, he had worn away her handkerchief.

With face a trifle hot she came presently upon Aunt Tilda and the Professor. The latter had just

been told of Don Anton's wounded shoulder; being extremely tribal in his instincts, his soul took sides with Moonlight.

"The young man has prodigious spirit," quoth the Professor, voice elate and brisk. "His hand, too, must be deft beyond imagination, to thus seize and return a flying knife! Truly, I should like to have witnessed the episode."

Aunt Tilda scolded, and said that Professor Doremus was drifting into savagery.

Having delivered his defiance to the Red Bull who received it without reply, Moonlight struck southward. The long, swinging stride of President would soon overtake Jeff Horne and Red River Bill, who were to pitch camp for the night at the Hill of the Cross.

Five miles had been covered, and Moonlight was picking his way at a walk through a roughish stretch of trail. As he reached a corner of the cañon through which the trail wound, from the flat ground above, and about one hundred yards ahead, a rifle cracked. The shot had been well aimed. Moonlight, after an ineffectual effort to retain his seat, reeled and fell from the saddle. He lay on the grass, face to the sky, hands spread wide. President reared and plunged, and then trotted off to a distance of twenty feet. He wheeled to look at his master, blowing out his nostrils and snorting.

The smoke drifted from the place where the rifle was fired, and above the edge of the cañon peered Pedro of the Knife. A look of satisfaction overspread his lance-scarred face, as he beheld his victim lying prone and nerveless. With a cry of triumph,

he drew his knife and came scrambling down the side of the cañon.

"Don Anton will want his scalp," he muttered.

Pedro of the Knife approached the prostrate Moonlight, who lay with set eyes and fingers clutched as in the final death-pang. President began to toss his head, and made as though to fly. Pedro of the Knife was half Indian, and President found the breeze poisoned of that Indian taint so alarming to a white man's horse.

Pedro of the Knife paused to soothe the excited President with pacific words; he did not want to frighten away the best pony in the Panhandle. The scalp should be Don Anton's; he designed President for himself. The pony of the dreaded Moonlight would be something to show and to brag of, when back in the plazas on the Concha. It would brighten the eyes of the señoritas, and blacken with envy the brows of the men, to look upon President, and hear how he, Pedro of the Knife, had won him! With this thought, he maneuvered until the uneasy President, trotting and curveting but refusing to leave, had taken position to windward. Missing that terrifying Indian smell, he became quiet, and looked at Pedro of the Knife in curious, non-understanding horse-fashion.

Pedro of the Knife, being reassured as to the restless President, again turned to his labors of blood. Blade in hand he bent above the prostrate form. An evil smile wreathed his lips, for he liked the work.

Suddenly a grip of steel closed upon the wrist of Pedro of the Knife. There was a twist, a sound of bones snapping, and the knife fell from his useless

fingers. He screamed in surprise and pain! The scream was like the screech of a wildcat in its death agony. Then he was whirled face downward. The next moment the knee of Moonlight was pressed hard between his shoulders.

As swiftly as he had tied those Cross-8 steers, Moonlight took the soft sash from about his middle, and bound the elbows of Pedro of the Knife together behind his back. That the right arm was broken in no wise touched him with pity; he handled the helpless Pedro without ruth or mercy. The latter, after that first screech, lay mute as a fox; his Indian blood did that much for him. He made no struggle; the strength of his conqueror was too prodigious, too monstrous. From the first he felt himself in a grasp so over-mastering that resistance was preposterous. It would have been like throwing up one's arm to ward away a landslide.

Moonlight took the would-be assassin's pistol from his belt, and broke it across a bowlder. He splintered the rifle which Pedro of the Knife had brought from his ambush on the hill. Then he picked up the bound Pedro's knife from the grass. It was heavy, with a long blade, and balanced in the hand like a hatchet. He tried the edge; its razor-like keenness justified the name of its owner.

"And now," said Moonlight, relentless as granite, tones cruelly ferocious, "while it is in my mind to cut your throat, it is in my mind still more to send you back to your master, Don Anton, as a best method of showing my contempt for him and you and every other dog of a Mexican. In your trade of assassination, however, you should show more wit.

Do not take it for sure that a man is dead just because he falls from the saddle. It may be that he but does it to tempt you into his hands." Then followed a pause in which he seemed to be settling life and death for Pedro of the Knife: "Yes, I shall send you back. But first let me give you a new name, and furnish a red baptism and the reason for it."

There was a flash of the descending blade, and the left ear of Pedro of the Knife was sheared smoothly away.

"You have been Pedro of the Knife. You will now be Pedro of the Ear."

The bleeding Pedro met the new pain without a moan, but the sweat-drops mottled his skin.

Moonlight brought up the pony of Pedro of the Knife, from the blind side-cañon where it had stood, hobbled and hidden, while its owner lay in murderous wait. He tossed the pinioned Pedro into the saddle, as lightly and as carelessly as though he were a sack of bran.

Detaining the pony by the bridle, Moonlight drove the knife deep into the saddle-horn, and with a sharp twist broke the brittle blade in two. Fitting the two-inch remnant that remained with the knife-haft into its proper sheath, he next replaced in their respective scabbards the shattered rifle and pistol. As he did so the brand on the pony's shoulder caught his eye. It was "Cross-8."

"Tell the Red Bull I'll owe him one for that!" he said, pointing to the brand. "Now you may go. Should you faint before you reach the Cross-8, the wolves will get you; wherefore I advise you to keep both your head and your seat."

Moonlight turned the pony's nose down the cañon.

"They'll reach the Canadian in an hour," he ruminated. "The pony knows the way, and the earless one should stay in the saddle that space. Still, should he roll off, it will mean no more than just a bad mouthful or two for the coyotes."

Moonlight gave his whistle and President, who seemed relieved in a ponyish way to behold his master again on his feet, trotted up. Across the pommel of the saddle, the badly directed bullet of Pedro of the Knife had plowed a furrow in the leather. Moonlight shook his head in critical disapproval.

"It's strange," mused he, as he fitted his foot to the stirrup, "that no Mexican is ever a good shot."

Jeff Horne and Red River Bill were sitting down to antelope steaks and baking-powder biscuit when Moonlight rode up.

"An' at that," said Jeff, "we only beat you by half an hour. We had to go 'round to the cottonwoods an' pick up our old camp."

Red River, the taciturn, tendered a bake-kettle full of hot biscuit. They were of his own construction, those biscuit, the same being a refreshment for which he had fame. Biscuit, like gambling and dancing, were among Red River's weaknesses. Tell him he was a great roper or rider, or handled a six-shooter like an angel, and he remained glumly indifferent. Mention his biscuit for their light, white, superior sort, and he straightway shone like the sun. Also, in his gratitude, he would give you anything he possessed. Moonlight, who believed in humoring every innocent foible, spoke in warm terms of the biscuit. Likewise

of the antelope steak wherewith the attentive Jeff loaded his tin plate. This put everybody in spirits.

In the midst of the feast, Red River's glance was caught by the furrow across the horn of Moonlight's saddle, which latter lay near him on the grass. He came to a dead point on the bullet mark, like a setter on a bird.

"Pedro of the Knife!" explained Moonlight tersely. "He bushwhacked me in Mitchell's Arroya."

"Where's his h'ar?" This expectantly.

Moonlight shook his head as indicating a paucity of Mexican scalps. At this sign that Pedro of the Knife still roamed the earth, Red River was on his feet in a moment, his face working cloudily with anticipated vengeance.

"Which I'll nacherally ride back to the Cross-8," he said.

"Stay where you are," said Moonlight. Red River slowly resumed his place by the camp fire. "I marked him, and sent him back with a message to Don Anton. You'll find his ear in one of my warbags."

Red River drew the saddle toward him, and rummaging in the bearskin warbag unpouched the gruesome token. This seemed to move him pleasantly; the frown cleared from his face in a measure, and was succeeded by a look of partial peace.

"An' yet, Cap'n," he said wistfully, "if you don't mind none, I'd a heap sooner had his skelp."

At this Moonlight laughed.

"That may come later," he responded.

There were cigarettes and silence for a space. It was Moonlight who spoke; stretching himself like some panther about to rest, he said lazily:

"I want to get an early start; we should be at the Dove's Nest by noon."

The Dove's Nest was the name given the Palo Duro home of Moonlight by the romantic Jeff.

"Said name bein' seelected," he explained, "as commem'rative of the tranquillity which thar prevails—thar bein' no ladies."

## CHAPTER XII

### THE PLOTTING OF ROBERT AND DON ANTON

FOUR days had done much to subdue the temper of the Canadian; the river was visibly lower. It doesn't take long for water to run away where the country slants seaward seven feet to the mile. The current was no longer strong; the surface no longer tossed and billowed. Robert was for having his teams into the ford at once, but the Red Bull stopped him.

"Wait!" he said, "until we level off the river bottom. A freshet, such as we've had, leaves it rough beyond description. If it didn't bog down your wagons, it would upset them."

The Cross-8 riders, four of them, brought down a band of three hundred ponies from the wire pasture. For the space of an hour the ponies were crossed and re-crossed at the ford. Splashing and dancing, mane tossing, eyes flashing with the sport of it, the wild mustangs made the journey back and forth a score of times. In the end the quicksand bottom was beaten out as flat and as hard as a threshing floor.

The two mule-skinners brought up the wagons and put them safely over, the water just touching the hubs. Then came old Cato with the surrey, and Ethel on Jet. The latter took to the water like a Newfoundland, for the Canadian was not Jet's first ford. At last all were safely on the north bank, and off for

the Bar-Z, the Red Bull, like a good neighbor, going with them. The amiable Red Bull went to show the way; besides, those three serving damsels drafted from the Cross-8 required convoy. They were not wholly in favor of their translation to the Bar-Z, and the Red Bull feared a stampede. All went safely, and the sun was an hour high in the west when the caravan halted at the new home.

The Bar-Z was made up of a half-dozen adobe buildings, including a camp-house for the riders. The ranch-building proper was not unlike the Cross-8 structure, only smaller. The mud fireplaces, too, were on the sides, instead of in the corners of the rooms, which showed that an American had planned it.

"Here you are!" quoth the Red Bull, waving a bland hand by way of inviting admiring attention to the arid desolation of the scene—"here you are in the center of as sweet a stretch of country as the Panhandle presents!"

Aunt Tilda, to whom the remark was more particularly addressed, made no response. Her heart in truth was a bit heavy as she compared the sand-blown waste with its coarse vegetation to the rich banks of the Chesapeake. She was no one to complain, however; so she smiled back at the enthusiastic Red Bull who, after seeing the family installed and saying a few fierce words in Spanish to the three conscript maid-servants, rode heavily away next morning for his own beloved Cross-8.

Aunt Tilda, now when she went upon setting the Bar-Z to rights, found the Professor invaluable. He was her major domo. Also, true to his instincts as a

teacher, our scientist expounded every natural mystery as fast as it arose. Did a badger sourly survey Aunt Tilda from its burrow in a hill to the rear, and alarm her with its striped face, the wise Professor made all clear.

"A solitary animal, my dear Madam!" he would say. "And absolutely harmless unless seized with the hands." Aunt Tilda had no thought of seizing badgers with her hands. The Professor ran on.

"It is a fossorial, plantigrade, carnivorous mammal of the family *mustetidæ* and sub-family *melinæ*."

Following which the excellent Professor would devote himself to tacking up strips of calico, to serve as wainscoting for the mud-walled rooms; or to superintending the sloppy energies of the Cross-8 conscript maidens as they whitewashed the building inside and out with native gypsum and water, which they applied with a sheepskin. The good Professor declared that he was never more happy. He said that he was charmed with the Bar-Z, the Panhandle, the cattle business and whatever thereunto appertained. It is a shrewd guess, however, that he found his sunshine in Aunt Tilda, and would have thought any place paradise where she made her home.

The fourth day at the Bar-Z was rendered luminous by a visit from the Doña Inez, who came with an armed retinue at her pony's tail.

"No," said she, explaining her escort armed to the teeth, "I do not need them; but I take them. The Indians are at peace, yes; but who knows! An Indian is uncertain."

The Doña Inez said that Don Anton kept to his room with the slashed shoulder.

"He makes threats, too," she said gayly. "The knife was a good thing; it was needed to arouse his manhood. I begin a little to love him."

The Doña Inez told of the sash-bound Pedro of the Knife.

"When he came," she exclaimed, "from his broken arm and from the agony of his ear, he fell out of the saddle as though dead. Oh, your Señor Moonlight" —to Ethel—"is a terrible adversary! He breaks arms, and crops ears, and then sends his victims back with a mouth full of insults."

Aunt Tilda and Ethel were shocked. The Doña Inez, in no wise affected, went forward composedly.

"Pedro shot at him from ambush, which was good; but he missed, which was bad. And so he caught Pedro, and broke his arm, and cut off his ear. Then he told him to call Don Anton a dog. But it will not end there; Don Anton had in the padre, and took a vow of vengeance."

"Of vengeance!" exclaimed Ethel.

"Why not? What is more manly than revenge?"

Robert was not greatly taken up by the cares of the Bar-Z. That was well; since his ignorance would have found itself helpless. The ranch was in charge of Mr. Peacock, manager, and a quartette of cowboys, who were so much an improvement over those of the Cross-8 as to be one and all Americans. They lived by themselves in the camp-house, a solitary community of five, and transacted their own housekeeping.

There was little to do at the Bar-Z, since the Canadian made the southern boundary of its range; and as the cattle, however hard might blow the bliz-

zard, would not cross so wide a stream, the labor of sign-camps and line-riding disappeared. At brief intervals the riders would bunch up what Bar-Z cattle had collected at the river, and throw them back on the pastures to the north. The two hundred head of beef, which was the slender output of the Bar-Z, had been sold and sent to the eastern yards the month before.

Having nothing to occupy him, Robert was given fullest opportunity to ponder the offensive Moonlight. The offensive one had planted fear in his heart; and because he feared he hated him. Beyond that fear and that hatred, however, the picture of the gray-eyed one, as he stood, dangerous and threatening before the lodge of Ironjacket, filled him with vague uneasiness. The memory rode him like a nightmare.

Robert, aside from talents of stealth and a native preference for creeping upon an enemy, was not without qualifications that belong with the detective. His memory for faces was photographic, a frequent ear-mark of timid souls. Robert not only recalled the gray-eyed one as though the latter's portrait had been etched upon his memory, but he was ghost-haunted by the feeling that the face was not new to him.

One day—it was that luminous day of the Doña Inez's visit—a thought struck him. The wonder and the terror of it set him a-totter on his feet. Recovering, he got out an old-fashioned album—chief among the dear possessions of Aunt Tilda. Hurrying over those earlier leaves that showed the Professor as a gay youth, the elder Alan Gordon, who had faced

the camera, as he would have faced an enemy, with a most portentous scowl, and Aunt Tilda in curls and crinoline, he went straight to the picture of young Alan. It was not the first time he had seen the picture. Often, since the death of old Alan Gordon, he had pored upon it as upon the face of a rival. He now gazed at it long and fixedly. There was no mistake; the sudden thought that had gripped him was right. Taken when the lad Alan was no older than twelve, it was none the less, as plain as ink and sun could make it, the picture of the gray-eyed Moonlight.

Robert drew a deep apprehensive breath. That young Alan, whose return to Somerset would rob him of the Gordon estate, is none other than his enemy! He had come to the Panhandle to obviate the last possibility of his discovery, and lo! he blunders upon him! Captain Moonlight—Old Tom Moonlight—are but aliases! The gray-eyed one is Alan, heir to old Alan Gordon, and Robert's cousin! What if he should learn of the death of his father, and the fortune which waits for him to claim it? What if his identity were to become known to Aunt Tilda? The dread surmise shakes the album in Robert's hands. And yet what is more certain?—certain to the point inevitable! Soon or late, with no more than two days' ride between them, the fact must out. The gray-eyed one himself will guess the relationship between them so soon as he hears Aunt Tilda's name, and is told that she has come from old Somerset!

Robert thanked his stars for the feud and the enmity that had broken out between them, and served to keep the Professor and Aunt Tilda from any acquaintance with the gray-eyed one.

"Two minutes' talk," thought Robert, "with that gossip-mongering Professor, and he would have learned all, even if he'd failed to guess it on hearing our names."

Robert knit his brows over the formulation of a plan. His avarice had no intention of letting the Gordon fortune slip through his fingers, without making an effort to clutch and hold it fast.

He began by slipping the picture of young Alan out of the album. His first impulse was to destroy it. The day was cool, and a cedar fire blazed in the mud fireplace. For one moment he thought of burning it. Then he changed his mind, and put the picture in his pocket.

As he did so, Ethel came into the room. Robert closed the album and laid it unobserved upon the table.

"The Doña Inez will only stay one day," said Ethel. "She wants me to return with her to her home. Aunt Tilda says that if I can prevail on the Professor to go with us, I may accept the invitation."

Instantly, a new idea struck Robert. Don Anton was as much the foe of the gray-eyed Alan as himself. Why not make an ally of the young *rico?*

"The Cross-8?" said Robert, replying to Ethel. "I, myself, shall go with you."

"We'll take the Professor, too," said Ethel.

Since the Doña Inez had spoken so surely of Robert's love, Ethel had begun to avoid him. And at that she did not altogether believe the Doña Inez, for she, herself, had never been given any hint of it. Still she shrunk from the lonesome twenty miles return ride in his company.

Robert did not want the Professor. He might be in the way when he got to Don Anton. Whatever was resolved upon between himself and the young *rico* must be kept hidden from Ethel and Aunt Tilda. It would be better to leave the talkative Professor at the Bar-Z. Besides the backward, bashful love of Robert kept cheering itself with the hope that it might one day be brave enough to speak. That day of courage might come on this very visit to the Cross-8. It made another reason for the Professor remaining behind.

"Why drag the Professor along?" said Robert. "Besides Aunt Tilda needs him here."

"No;"—and Ethel shook her pretty head with decision—"she says that now the calico is tacked up, and that awful whitewashing over, she can do without him."

When Aunt Tilda was sounded, she amplified the statement of Ethel. She said she could do without all of them. Having brought her house-settling down to what might be called the finer touches, Aunt Tilda for a day or two would prefer the field to herself.

"But how about your return?" said Aunt Tilda, dubiously. "I'm afraid of Indians."

The Doña Inez interfered; they should have her armed guard. The armed guard had nothing to do in life but travel up and down, a menace to trustless savages.

The Professor cared nothing for the "armed guard," but Robert felt relieved. He shared Aunt Tilda's apprehensions. For the heart of Robert was a hare's heart, and his tremulous courage the courage of an antelope. It was settled; the trio should return to the

Cross-8 with the Doña Inez, and the "armed guard" should protect their journey back.

The twenty-mile run from the Bar-Z to the Cross-8, with the splash through the Canadian at the finish, made the delightful scramble of an afternoon. The Professor and Robert had mounted themselves from the Bar-Z livestock, the latter on a pony, the Professor on a mule chosen for its air of wisdom. At one crisis, as a plover flew up, the Professor halted his long-eared charger to descant on that species of fowl. No one stayed to listen.

"It is of the family *charadriidæ*." His audience getting further and further away, he raised his voice: "Its eggs are piriform in shape—drab—heavily blotched with brown!" Robert who was nearest was now one hundred yards off. The Professor, in his passion to disseminate learning, began to shout. "It is distinguished by its axillars, which are ashen gray."

The Professor was quite alone now, since both his companions and the plover had left him far behind. Perceiving which, and the lecture being ended, he stirred up Socrates—for so he had named the mule—and came powdering along in pursuit.

Robert was much closeted with Don Anton, during the stay at the Cross-8; he and that bilious young grandee—his shoulder in double bandages—had much to say to one another. The Professor, for company, was driven to vibrate between the Red Bull and Cato, the latter having attended the party with the surrey in the rôle of baggage-master. Aunt Tilda had also commissioned him to look after the sartorial welfare of the Professor; for old Cato's genius was many sided, and ran all the way from coachman to valet.

The Professor, strolling about, found Cato busy with curry-comb and brush, putting a bottle-gloss on Socrates. There was a sympathetic tenderness as he rubbed the mule's sleek, mouse-colored coat.

"Socrates is a noble animal!" ejaculated the Professor, pausing to consider the long-eared one.

"You doan't nevah want to praise your own mule or your own whiskey, Professah," said Cato, still busy with comb and brush.

"And why not?"

"Kase, if you-all do, dar'll allers come folks aroun' to steal d' one or borry d' yuther, shore!"

"But you seem to like Socrates, Cato," said the Professor.

"Yassir, I love him. He jes' nacherally kicks d' daylight outen one of dem Mexicans a minute ago."

The Professor was contemplating the deep, thoughtful eye of Socrates, and Cato's reason for loving him missed fire.

"He is a magnificent beast," said the Professor, at last, "or I know nothing of quadrupeds."

"He's shore a dead shot," said Cato approvingly, "with that off hind hoof. He plants it on d' buckle of dat Mexican's belt as plumb center as you could put your finger."

"Did Socrates hurt the man?" asked the Professor, rousing to the tenor of Cato's remarks.

"Sho, Professah!" returned Cato disgustedly; "you-all cain't hurt a Mexican. He ain't got sense enough."

"Speaking of Mexicans," observed the Professor, who was fond of collecting the wisdom of Cato, "the young Don Anton, with whom Robert is so suddenly taken, seems a fine fellow."

"I dunno, I dunno, Professah! Of co'se, if young Marse Robert like him, I reckon dar's some reason for it. But I dunno."

"What do you mean with your eternal 'dunno'?"

"Well, Professah," and Cato looked up quizzically, "you knows d' niggahs has a sayin' that you can't tell nuthin' about a man by d' way he looks on Sunday. Now I sort o' allows that dis yere Don Anton, seein' as he's done come to d' Cross-8 co'tin' his gal, has got on his Sunday bes'. So, speakin' of d' kin' of man he is, I says, says I, I dunno."

Don Anton and Robert had a final talk the morning that the Professor and his party, guarded by the "armed guard," who looked upon a close inspection not a little like Falstaff's soldiery done in Mexican, started back for the Bar-Z.

"Then we understand one another," said Robert. The two stood alone outside the ranch-house. "I shall go to Austin at once, and take out a patent to the land. Once the title is in me, I'll sue out the writ and bring it back to serve on him here."

"Exactly!" cried Don Anton. "Bring the writ, and I'll have Pedro of the Knife play sheriff. His arm will be well, but his ear will still smart! Ah, yes, the earless Pedro of the Knife will like to serve that writ! He shall have with him a force; we'll make it an occasion for wiping this gringo out."

"What force will you get? Your Mexicans?"

"Yes: only I shall send with them a handful of Kiowas. They will do the work as I want it done; my Mexicans might fail. You need not fear!" continued Don Anton. He noticed Robert's lip twitch, and his shifty eyes begin to rove as though the pros-

pect frightened him. "You need not fear! Your title to the land will protect you. If the people whom you send to get possession overstep their instructions and blood be shed, what then? That is not your fault. The state must seek the murderers among the Kiowas."

"Will they kill him?" asked Robert, a little huskily. He desired death for the gray-eyed one; but the bald thought of it when set face to face with him, was calculated to stagger. "And you think they'll kill him?" he repeated mistily.

"Kill him!" and the young *rico* gritted out the words, while his black eyes sparkled. "They will kill him throughout a whole day—those Kiowas! It was he who slew Sun Boy, who was of this very band. Kill him! They will torture him! Which"—he patted the bandaged shoulder tenderly—"is what my vengeance craves!"

## CHAPTER XIII

### ROBERT'S TONGUE-TIED LOVE

THE Doña Inez rode with the Bar-Z party to the ford. Don Anton, in a gush of unusual condescension, would have done the same, but his knife-wounded shoulder declared against the rough motion of a mustang. As they neared the river, the Doña Inez drew up for one moment by the side of Robert.

"So you and Don Anton have pooled your hates," she whispered. "Has neither the courage to follow his foe alone? And yet you, as well as he, expect the love of a woman!"

Robert was somewhat taken aback. He cast a frightened glance at the hectoring Doña Inez. Her remarks, aside from the soreness of the taunts, struck him the more nervously since they fell at a moment when he had Ethel most upon his slope of thought. He could manage no reply. His dullness was of the less consequence, however, for the sprightly Doña Inez, having fired her shaft of sarcasm, spurred forward without waiting for his return.

Robert rode back to the Bar-Z, vibrating like a pendulum between hate and love—thoughts of the gray-eyed one and thoughts of Ethel. More than once he resolved to show Ethel his heart; but each time when he would have made the attempt the words refused

to come. He would lag in the rear alone to collect himself. Then when, as he imagined, he had succeeded, he would press forward with the full purpose of plunging, sink or swim, into that momentous declaration. But his heart would thump, his throat turn dry and harsh, while his cheek was ice one moment and fire the next. Do all he might he could make no start.

This dumbness, not to say numbness, was not all Robert's fault. Ethel herself was so far telepathic as to half-way read his thought. Of late, and particularly since the raillery of the unconventional Doña Inez, she had bestowed upon him a closer and more interested attention. Not that she had any love to give him; but what woman is without a careful curiosity, when the impression begins to gather that she herself is loved?

Not since the days of Eve has any woman shrunk from being loved. Nor are women without a pretty cruelty in coils of this blushing sort. They are like your dishonest trader, willing to receive without making any return. For one thing, they like flattery; and love is the soul of flattery.

Ethel was in warmest truth a woman. Therefore she scanned Robert's face, as sailors scan the sky, to discover what storms or calms of sentiment his bosom caged. Even to her untaught inexperience the verity of those half merry, half earnest jestings of the Doña Inez began to be revealed. She had never observed it before; but then she was young, and moreover, she had never before searched for it.

Love is as difficult to hide as smoke; and that Robert had not betrayed himself sooner, not only to Ethel

but to Aunt Tilda and the Professor, speaks tomes in favor of his genius for concealment. For all that Ethel's eyes were being opened to it. And, being opened, she found his love amusing rather than alarming, and in its way a compliment. However, since she had no mind to have him go beyond the stage of compliment, she now began to put obstacles in his way. It was a kind of pleasant sport at that. To avoid Robert's avowal of a heart made desolate with love for her, Ethel held Jet close by the sedate side of Socrates, and kept up a never-flagging talk with the Professor.

The latter savant was amazed, delighted! The fair Ethel had never before exhibited such a thirst for exact information. Commonly, she fled like quicksilver from his disquisitions; or, when flight would have been impolite, listened with an absent, ennuied air as though her wits were far away. Now she was all eagerness; a ceaseless rivulet of inquiry rippled from her rosebud lips.

The Professor was put upon his mettle. At her excited request, he explained a prairie dog that squeaked at them, as a "*Sciuromorphic rodent, genus Cynomys, species Ludovicianus,*" and next, being exhaustively probed as to those vegetables, flourished with equally long unearthly Latin terms concerning the cactus and the Spanish bayonet. It was a field day for the Professor, who rode into the Bar-Z radiant, and took prompt occasion to inform Aunt Tilda of Ethel's preternatural appetite for learning.

"Believe me, my dear Madam," he said, "she will one day eclipse Voltaire's Emilie, who spoke Latin and Greek, as well as every modern tongue, and was

besides the only soul in Europe who understood Newton. When, however," added the Professor defensively—"when, however, I speak of eclipsing Voltaire's Emilie I would be understood as meaning only in erudition; for in certain social respects the lady alluded to was not I fear a happy example."

If Ethel's sudden hunger for scientific knowledge pleased the Professor, the story ran the other way with Robert. And yet, if that had been all, he would have invented some method of making her hear his love. But there arose another and even more baffling reason why he could not speak. This latter, when it broke upon him, surprised him vastly; the more since, while it seemed wholly within himself, he had had no hint of its existence.

It is a singular truth that a man may become so well acquainted with a woman, or she with him, as to put him in peril of being laughed at should he turn passionately tender toward her. The man and woman who were strangers yesterday may burn with mutual love. They may feel it, tell it, believe it, and yet be unembarrassed. Their hearts put away bashfulness; their sighs brim to lips that know no hesitation and overflow unchecked! All is natural, and beautifully fearless!

The unhappy opposite of this freedom and unrestraint exists to render mute the pair who have been reared together from their cradle days, and grown up side by side. They can talk and tell one another of everything but love; they can be to each other everything save lovers. There is a quieter intimacy, an intimacy as it were of brother and sister, that has come between them to reject, with a kind of shame,

the nearer intimacy of man and wife. That quieter, cooler intimacy has produced a paradox, and when the question makes toward orange blooms and wedding bells they are held at bay by the dampening discovery that they know each other too well.

Robert felt this element of separation rise up like a wall between himself and Ethel. They had abode beneath the same roof since their earliest years; and now that fraternal closeness asserted itself to paralyze expression of a warmer love. As has been said, the knowledge was new to him; but its newness made it none the less a check.

The discovery astounded, while it dismayed him —coming like some hateful dawn to dissipate a dearest dream. For months he had held before him the thought of one day telling his love to Ethel; now, when the occasion and the will were his, he found himself in fetters unsuspected. He was the more fretted, the more angrily impatient with himself, since those fetters that restrained him appeared as fetters forged of his own bashfulness.

Time and again Robert called up all his resolution. He bound himself and made a vow to speak. He would trample that bashfulness beneath his feet! He would forget himself—forget Ethel—forget everything but his love! Now surely he could speak.

These doughty decisions, made and unmade a score of times, were one and all in vain. Those binding resolutions refused to bind, and proved themselves but ropes of sand that fell away as fast as they were formed. At last, reluctant, shame-faced, silent, inwardly raging, he fell back self-defeated. He could not talk of love to Ethel. He had fought a battle

with his own nature; he had been worsted, and his defeat showed in the troubled glance, and the red shadow that sat upon his brow.

These signs and signal smokes of baffled sentiment went not unnoted by the sly Ethel. As she plied the Professor with queries calculated to unlock his eloquence, she gave Robert slantwise looks, and so got ever a glimmering guess of the progress—or rather the lack of it—he was making. Even the rapt Professor might have been given some picture of the business, had he not been so swept away on the profound tides of his own learned settings forth of what natural marvels, botanical and zoological, fell in their path. At last the Bar-Z was reached, with Robert's love unsaid.

Ethel, being home, breathed freer. Not that she had been troubled or oppressed, or indeed had found her late experience other than an exhilarating albeit novel form of hide and seek. Still, her soul was easier. She could now lay aside the Professor for Aunt Tilda. The latter would be a pleasanter refuge, a more agreeable defense; for, however admirable she found the Professor as a shield, his wisdom had begun to pall upon her.

It was the next day when Robert announced for the first time the necessity of his going to Austin. He gave divers reasons, and was at considerable care to make them foggy and deep. They were all business reasons, and all false; he never for a moment hinted at his secret purpose of buying the title to that coveted tract on the Palo Duro.

Aunt Tilda, who loved Robert with a mother's love, was worried. Austin lay hundreds of miles away.

The difficult journey must be made by stage-coach. There were road agents—bank-full rivers—Aunt Tilda saw countless lions in the way.

"Can't you do your business by letter?" she asked.

Robert explained that it was impossible. For one principal thing he had resolved to give up "Bar-Z" as a cattle brand, and register a new one. That, of itself, he said, required a visit to Austin. He wanted to be legally ready, by the spring round-up, to mark his calves with the initial letters of his own name. If for nothing beyond the pride of it, he preferred "R. B." to "Bar-Z."

With Aunt Tilda, who never wearied herself with a too deep digging into causes, this last from Robert seemed to have the force of argument, and it was settled then that two days later he should start for Tascosa to take the stage.

There are two conditions which a right-hearted man will ever confront for himself. These be conditions of war and love. In neither do the proprieties permit of a proxy. A true man, a brave man, one worthy foe's feud or woman's heart, will do his own fighting and his own courting, and never dream of substitutes.

Robert was neither true man nor brave. Were it war he would have skulked, and at the best sent some one braver than himself to serve in his timid stead. It being love, he followed a parallel course, and resolved to enlist Aunt Tilda.

In coming to this decision he had pride enough to find fault with himself. He even gave himself hard names, and waxed denunciatory concerning his cowardice and want of virile fiber. But—here he

spread out his hands in a self-excusing way—what was he to do? He had tried to speak and found himself too weak. There was nothing for it but Aunt Tilda.

Robert, by skillful maneuverings, got Aunt Tilda alone. To his joy, those verbal difficulties which had closed his lips when he would have talked with Ethel vanished. Having Aunt Tilda for an auditor was a helpful change; where before he had been silent he became eloquent now. All his later life he had gone to Aunt Tilda with his woes and needs, and this doubtless was a present assistance.

Robert, not without a whimper, besought the help of Aunt Tilda. He worshiped Ethel! She was necessary to his happiness! He even said that he could not live without her, although this was hyperbole. He closed with a flood of sentiment that resulted in tears. As he wiped away the drops from his cheek, he said:

"Will you speak to her while I'm away?"

The request was preferred in a most pleading tone. Aunt Tilda heard him without interrupting. Her silence arose from a feeling of astonishment to find herself thus distinguished. She had considered many contingencies, but her imagination never pictured this one. Here was Robert, thrusting his love-racked heart upon her as a sacred trust! Aunt Tilda gasped; it was all excessively disconcerting.

Insensibly, Aunt Tilda had grown to regard Robert and Ethel as her own personal children, and the chance that they might one day marry had not entered her thoughts. Robert's love-confessions, therefore, gave her a kind of start. She was by no means

sure for a moment that she liked the idea. Moved by Robert's tears, however, Aunt Tilda suppressed any first expression of disapproval. Collecting herself, and molded by her love for Robert, her ready nature even began to ask itself, Why not?

To be sure, in order to answer this, she had also to conquer the feeling that the pair were not still in their small childhood. They had grown into maturity without her becoming awake to it, and it now required a distinct effort on her part to see that they were no longer boy and girl, but man and woman. Poor Aunt Tilda sighed! The realization brought with it an atmosphere of sadness.

There came a long wait, in which she put and re-put to herself that query: Why not? The answering reflection began to cheer her. After all it might be a change for the good. They would continue to live with her. There would be no breaking up of household ties. More, it would close the door on such disheartening possibilities.

Indubitably, if Robert and Ethel failed to marry each other, it was not to be expected that they would continue to remain mateless for the balance of their days. Ethel would find a husband in some one else; and he would take her away. Robert would lead to church some blushing damsel, with whom—when the damsel was done blushing—she, Aunt Tilda, might not find herself in concord. Here she had a vision of herself living in loneliness! This made her gulp. She began to hope that Robert and Ethel would wed. Yes, indeed! then would they three be together. And there would come children—but here Aunt Tilda checked herself. It was such an absolute

case of counting one's chickens before they were hatched!

These ruminations, as they ran to and fro in Aunt Tilda's head, took up no little time. During this space she sat gazing at Robert somewhat wildly. Her silence began to frighten him; he ceased mopping away his tears to question her with his eyes.

Getting hold of her voice, Aunt Tilda began very naturally.

"Why don't you ask Ethel yourself?"

Robert, with a kind of sob, shook his helpless head.

"I fear to ask her," he said.

Then he told all—how he had attempted to speak, and couldn't. It was beyond his strength, above his powers; his one hope was Aunt Tilda!

These abject avowals did nothing toward strengthening Aunt Tilda's respect for Robert.

Women revere force; they like men to carry them off in the teeth of protest; their deepest admiration is reserved for Sabines who wed them *vi et armis*. Nothing is more alarming to your true woman than a masculine weakness greater than her own. Once she places herself at a safe distance from it, she settles her feathers to a comfortable contempt for the man who has frightened her with its display.

Aunt Tilda, in spite of her maternal attitude toward Robert, was set on edge when he admitted that he was afraid to speak to Ethel. He saw a corner of her contempt sticking out, and sought to protect himself with an explanation.

"It isn't fear," said he, "it's diffidence."

Aunt Tilda drew partial relief from this substitu-

tion of terms, although she vaguely felt that it marked a distinction rather than a difference.

She and Robert settled themselves to what one might describe as a passionless review of the situation. The idea of a wedding waxed in favor with Aunt Tilda. By the time they had talked ten minutes, she was as ardently anxious for it as Robert himself.

"Remember that it means my happiness," pleaded Robert.

The next day, as Robert was making ready for his journey, something occurred to set Aunt Tilda thinking. Robert must ride alone as far as the Cross-8 ranch, and from the plenitude of her wisdom she had come out to endow him with a few cautions. From the Cross-8 he would be guarded to Tascosa by those swarthy janizaries, the "armed guard" of the Doña Inez. As to what previous perils might lie in wait, however, Aunt Tilda felt compelled to have a final word. Ethel was with her to say good-bye.

Robert, who was standing by his pony, which Cato had just brought up, paused, foot in stirrup, to look at Ethel.

"Why not ride with me for a mile?" he asked wistfully. "Cato will saddle Jet in a moment."

Robert's tone fell almost to the plaintive. Ethel's, as she responded, was brightly gay. It was as if one sorrowed over a coming separation while the other felt relieved. Aunt Tilda, in her new enlightenment, observed this, and found therein much that was unsatisfactory.

Then came worse.

"Poor Jet!" said Ethel. "I had him out yesterday,

and I think he lamed himself. At any rate he came in utterly fagged. I couldn't ride him to-day; it would be too much for him."

As though these cheerful prevarications were his cue, and he would make profert of himself in their disproof, Jet at this pinch came tearing round the corner of the 'dobe, curveting and buck-jumping, a thorough example of a pony in spirits. He ran to Ethel on a theory of sugar; for it was her habit to regale him with stray lumps of that confection.

This prompt refutation of Ethel's reasons for not riding that mile with Robert disquieted Aunt Tilda. The more, because while Robert changed color and looked as though he had received a blow, Ethel, unabashed, continued as merry as a lark.

"A merciful girl is merciful unto her beast!" said Ethel lightly. "Isn't she, Jet?"

Jet gave a whinnying squeal. But whether the squeal were a squeal of assent to Ethel's preachments on mercy, or a squeal of protest at her failure to give him any sugar, did not appear.

Aunt Tilda beheld in this affair that which filled her soul with distrust. The thought had never taken form with her that Ethel might refuse Robert. She had considered only Robert; and took somewhat for granted the sure willingness of Ethel.

"Perhaps," thought Aunt Tilda, to whom optimism was easy, "she has already fathomed Robert's feeling, and is inclined to be coy. Girls are fond of coquetry, and Ethel is a girl."

This sage solution of that contradiction which Ethel's words and Jet's high-flown spirits presented quieted Aunt Tilda's momentary uneasiness. But

it did not present itself to Robert, or if it did he rejected it. Following an appealing glance at Aunt Tilda, he rode away visibly cast down.

The Indian fears of Aunt Tilda were groundless, and, with nothing more threatening than a coyote to cross his path, Robert arrived in due season at the Cross-8. Don Anton was still there, shoulder slowly mending, rancor gathering heat.

"Do your mission to Austin," said he, as the next morning Robert made ready to go, "and return as speedily as you may. All shall be ready. Our vengeance must not be starved by too long a wait."

"And those Kiowas! There will be no hitch in that quarter?"

"Pedro of the Knife is already among them. They will listen. His mother was a squaw of their tribe. I tell you there will come no failure," concluded Don Anton fiercely, his white teeth showing. "I am sure of nothing if not of this Moonlight's insolent blood."

## CHAPTER XIV

### JEFF HORNE TURNS MINER

While those sand-buried rubies were never out of the mind of Moonlight, it struck him—for he was not without powers of self-observation—as curious that they always came coupled with thoughts of the "Beautiful One." He did not know Ethel's name, and was angry with himself for being ignorant of it. This darkness seemed criminal, and in atonement he called her the "Beautiful One." The handkerchief thrown him by the Doña Inez was the "Beautiful One's"; he had seen the Doña Inez whip it from her neck. There was a silk embroidered "E" in one corner. What should that stand for? Plainly, it was the initial of a name. And that name!—was it Edith? or Emily? or Eunice? or what? He could recall many names that commenced with E. He wasted much time over that square of dainty cloth. It seemed odorous of the beautiful throat that had worn it. And all the time there arose never the thought that he had no right to its possession.

Once, indeed, he had said to himself that he ought to have returned it.

"In that way," he argued, "I might have learned her name"—for he put this contemplated act of justice on no higher ground. "Yes, if I'd returned it I might have found out her name." Then, after reflection: "But I should have lost the handkerchief."

Moonlight did not suspect himself of being in love with the "Beautiful One." Nor was he; but the ground was plowed, and another meeting would have sown the seed of it.

As he gazed at the gay handkerchief and its untranslatable "E," his anger with his present existence, and a longing—that was wonderfully like sadness—for something else, increased within him. As though their possession would repair all, his reflections wandered off to those inevitable rubies, hidden by the monk so long ago.

It evinced the gothic character of his sensibilities, that at no time did he feel shame or any modest touch of it, when remembering his vainglorious struttings and vaporings—his open contempt of Robert under the cottonwoods, and his subsequent swaggerings at the Cross-8 *baile*. So crudely of a farthest heretofore was his inborn sense of every social propriety, so roughly bad had he been formed by his sojourn with the Kiowas, that he felt secure concerning his conduct on those occasions. Also, he was well content with that knife-throwing; and with the later encounter, in which the bad marksmanship of Pedro of the Knife cost that Mexican an ear.

All these he embraced as natural, while at the same time he dismissed them as trivial. They, being slight matters of inferior moment, could have no effect in forming the "Beautiful One's" opinions of him. She would forget them as he did. So far, however, as they possessed weight with her, they should incline judgment in his favor.

Thus, with unconscious savagery, flowed the reasonings of the gray-eyed one. At the bottom, how-

ever, of his musings and dreamings, his conjecturings and regrettings, lay two resolves, like two unhewn stones at the bottom of a deep well. They were as yet without shape, since thus far he had fashioned them into no plan. He was resolved to again see the "Beautiful One"; likewise, his determination had become fixed to have in some fashion a try for those rubies. He would be unhappy else; and he was much too primal to accept grief without a struggle.

Once came a glimmer, like some forgotten ray of the conventional. He wished he had not danced with the Doña Inez. True, he had thought only of insulting Don Anton, and letting his own hardihood stand carelessly out at the young *rico's* expense. And yet, he may have offended *her*—the "Beautiful One," whose name began with E. This momentarily disturbed him, and made him melancholy. However, as he couldn't see why it should, the feeling was presently dismissed. His presence at the Cross-8 *baile* was intended only as a defiance of Don Anton, whose peons devastated his buffalo camp and whose cattle he had lifted in reprisal. That whirling dance with the Doña Inez had been superadded to his original plan, by way of emphasis to that defiance.

"Surely," considered our hopeful young barbarian, "the Beautiful One"—whose handkerchief he pressed to his lips, and whose sweet name began with E—"must have understood these things. Every dull, unlettered maid of Mexico, at the ball that night, understood. There could have been no chance, then, that the Beautiful One—wise, and brightened by education—was ignorant."

Having settled these things so as to give himself

the most ease, he again lowered his brows to the problem of those rubies. How to move that sand-mountain?—how to find that treasure-hiding spring and bring it to the light?—those were the questions he proposed to himself.

One evening he turned on Jeff Horne; that good man and tried companion was oiling a six-shooter.

"Didn't you tell me that you were once a miner?"

Jeff looked up from the six-shooter.

"Why, I reckon I did let fly some such bluff," he said. "Still, between us, I wouldn't advise you to gamble much on what I know about mining."

"But you have worked as a miner?"

"Thar's nothin'," said Jeff, laying aside the six-shooter—"thar's nothin' I esteems so much as frankness among pards. The trooth is, Cap'n, my minin' op'rations was confined to saltin' one claim, an' sawin' it off on a ragin' an' onfettered tenderfoot, who'd come pirootin' into the boundless West to spend money."

"You could drift into the bosom of a hill?"

"Shore! Any fool who saveys pick from shovel could do that."

Moonlight regarded Jeff with a quizzical eye.

"Uncle Jeff," said he, after a moment, "I've a mining job for you."

At the extended title Jeff had thrown up his hands with a gesture of despair.

"Which I knowed the worst was on its way, the minute you says 'Uncle Jeff.' The only other time you ever honors me in that manner, was when I was prevailed on to ford the Pecos, doorin' the Joone

rise; an' I comes within an ace of drowning. But, go on!" The last, desperately.

"This isn't going to kill you," laughed Moonlight; "and there should be a fortune in it for all of us —you and Red River, as well as myself."

"Proceed!" observed Jeff, heroically. "Thar's nothin' so gilds toil as riches. Besides"—and here his manner became apologetic—"I'm not one of them effete 'ristocrats who holds that manyooal labor is degradin'. No, sir, not me; I only claims it's disgustin'—which is a heap worse."

Moonlight, disregarding the observations of his companion concerning labor, gave him an inkling of what was in his mind. He said nothing definite about rubies or treasure of any sort. The plan was this: Jeff must employ a half dozen Mexicans—they might be picked up in Tascosa. Then, with their aid, he was to tunnel the sand-mountain, following as his guide the thin stream that flowed from the buried spring. It would take time, doubtless; for not only would the tunneling move slowly, and still more slowly, the farther he drifted into the hill, but the tunnel must be "timbered" to keep it from caving in.

"My notion," explained Moonlight, "is that you will need five Mexicans; two to dig and wheel out the sand; two to chop and fashion the timbers to secure the tunnel; and a fifth to keep camp and cook for you."

"An' me, personal?" demanded Jeff, with a look of concern.

"You're to superintend the Mexicans."

"Good scheme!" exclaimed Jeff, in evident relief.

"All I has to do then is keep them Castilians diggin', an' bend an occasional but stimyoolatin' gun over their heads, by way of cheerin' on the work?"

"That's the programme. Meanwhile, Red River and I will stick close to the buffaloes, killing and skinning, to earn the money to keep you and your Mexicans going."

"Well," said Jeff, after a pause, "I sees nothin' in the prospect that a proud an' haughty paleface need shrink from. When do you-all allow I'd better round-up them pleebians, an' plunge into this yere enterprise?"

"At once! We'll go over and take a look at the sand-mountain to-morrow; you'll then get a clearer notion of what's to be done."

Jeff Horne went down to Tascosa, and, by a strangest of best fortunes, picked up a wheelbarrow and two shovels. They were in the possession of Kimball the blacksmith. That artisan explained the mystery of their presence in the Panhandle, by telling how they arrived with a stray Irishman, who considered them his lares and penates. Getting his bearings, however, he abandoned them in favor of the strange gods which belonged with the region, and in the last of it had been drawn into joining a cow-outfit where, having a genius for the culinary, he was made cook. The shovels and wheelbarrow had become the goods and chattels of Blacksmith Kimball by right of purchase, he having given a pair of red blankets for them. He sold them to Jeff, who augmented the outfit with a pair of chopping axes from Howard's store.

Later, by keeping a careful eye on the monte tables

which abounded in Tascosa, Jeff enlisted the services of five Mexicans whom the games had bankrupted.

"What are you going to set them at?" asked Blacksmith Kimball, who was a gossip.

"Which I'm goin' to set them to diggin' down an offensive sand-hill," returned Jeff.

"They won't stay with you," said Blacksmith Kimball, for he had no faith in the stability of the Mexican character. "They'll quit with the first blister on their hands."

Jeff thought not. He had schemes for retaining the affections of that quintette. For one thing he would not pay them until the digging was over with and done. Also, he proposed to inaugurate a reign of terror, and hold them loyally to their tasks through the controlling power of fear.

"An' as a last resort," explained Jeff, "I'll nacherally fall back on my faithful old buffalo gun. The first one of them greasers that really tries to quit, will shore quit in the smoke; an', from what I've seen of Mexicans, I don't reckon as how I'll have to bump off more'n one, before the balance 'll begin to see things in their troo light."

Blacksmith Kimball nodded approval; the system outlined by Jeff should without doubt accomplish much. The pair went over to the dance hall, and drank to each other's health.

The Mexicans, in disproof of the slanderous apprehensions of Jeff and Blacksmith Kimball, behaved extremely well—for Mexicans. The sand was easy to dig, for one encouraging matter, and that was fortunate. Under the compelling thumb of Jeff the burrowing began; at the end of a week the hill had been

pierced to a distance of one hundred feet. As nearly as might be guessed, it would require three months to reach the spring. The deeper the drift, the longer it would take to wheel out the sand; and that had to be considered in making a calculation.

As fast as the tunnel was pushed forward, the sides and roof were "timbered" with split pine slabs, cut from the side of the monk's hill. There arose a single trouble: the sand, being as fine and as dry as snuff, would seek out every crack and crevice between the slabs to come sifting through. This made tedious work of the timbering, since the joints must be as tight as though meant to hold water, in order to keep back the sand, which else would stream in to fill the tunnel.

Moonlight remained with Jeff a day or two at the start. He was mightily cheered by the rapidity with which the work was driven forward, and the deft accuracy of Jeff's engineering—for the latter followed the little stream of water into the sandy labyrinth of the hill, as surely as ever Theseus followed Ariadne's clue of silk.

Being satisfied on the score of Jeff and his moiling Mexicans, Moonlight made ready to return to the Dove's Nest. He would visit Jeff from time to time to note how the work came on. Meanwhile, the robe-hunting season was in full blast; there were buffaloes that must be killed.

"Suppose some of them Cross-8 people come nosin' 'round?" questioned Jeff, as Moonlight was about to ride away.

"You've got your Sharp's and your six-shooters. Stand them off!"

Jeff received these instructions with a serene face; they appeared to dovetail with his inclinations. What he said might indicate as much.

"Right you be!" he exclaimed. "Your orders, Cap'n, are in strict line with what I'd have su'gested myse'f. Which," he concluded, with the manner of one who pays himself a compliment, "is only another an' most convincin' proof of how great minds allers thinks alike."

The buffaloes came drifting slowly in from the northern pastures in vast droves, and Moonlight and Red River were kept busy from dawn till dark. It is no light task to kill and skin thirty buffaloes—thirty was the number to which they limited themselves as being a fair day's work. Besides, they must peg out and scrape the hides for curing.

The killing grounds, an hour's ride from the Dove's Nest, were the gentle eastern slope of a low hill. The hill offered a natural bed-ground for the buffaloes, and each morning one was sure of finding there a hundred or more of old full-robed bulls, luxuriating in the first rays of the morning sun as they dried the frost from their shaggy backs. The killing of the day before in no wise seemed to warn them. Every morning saw the hill a slaughtering ground; that evening a fresh contingent, unalarmed, would come drifting in and choose it for a resting place. Moonlight was given no unusual work; he bowled over his daily thirty—and might have made it three hundred had he cared to—without stirring from his tracks. After the first bull was down, it was the merest case of load and fire, as fast as cartridges could be snapped into the rifle and the rifle brought to the shoulder.

When thirty were stretched, Red River drove out from the Dove's Nest in a big wagon; the buffaloes were skinned, and the robes carted back to the camp. Then came the pegging out and scraping; for the drying grounds lay close under the lee of the Dove's Nest, there being coyotes and Indians and Mexicans—all thievish perils in the order named—from whose larcenies the robes must be defended. There were the hide-bugs, too; but a sprinkling of poisoned water did for them just what a sprinkling of rifle bullets was expected to do for the others.

Three weeks, replete of rifle smoke and buffalo robes, went by at the Dove's Nest, and Moonlight and the indefatigable Red River had stretched, cured and piled up six hundred robes.

"At least three thousand dollars' worth," was the comment of Moonlight, as he considered the harvest. "I shall leave you"—this to Red River—"to bale them up, while I ride down to the 'Dobe Walls, and arrange their sale. It's about time that Uncle Jeff encouraged his Mexicans with a pay-day."

Moonlight stopped one night with Jeff, at his camp by the monk's hill. That sterling man was having unusual worry, because of the sand sifting through the timbering of his tunnel. Upon that very day, one of his Mexicans had carelessly struck an upright with his shovel. He knocked it loose, and the dry, snuff-like sand, fine as flour, came pouring in through the opened crack. It was the work of the afternoon to repair damages and wheel out the inrushing sand. By dark, however, Jeff, with his assistants, had restored the situation to what he termed "normal."

"Also," he added, as he recounted the mishap, "I'd have shore massacred that Mexican, only he's by nacher so plumb industrious that I hated to lose him. As it was I repressed my passions, merely p'intin' out how all that yereafter lay between his skelp an' my bowie knife was him not doin' it ag'in."

Moonlight, two days later, rode President in to the 'Dobe Walls. The latter picket post of civilization consisted of a blacksmith shop, a barroom, and a great outfitting store—all of sun-dried bricks.

In the hour following his arrival, Moonlight managed the disposal of those three thousand robes, and Merchant Wright—their purchaser—who kept the outfitting store, had given orders to his mule-skinners to hook up their teams and bring them in.

"Only you needn't bring 'em here," said he. "When you've got them into your wagons, head straight for Dodge. I'll take the word of Old Tom Moonlight for the count."

Our young friend, thus complimented, could do no less than show his appreciation in strong waters all 'round.

While Moonlight stood at the rum-sloppy counter with Mr. Wright, drinking, and considering buffaloes in every tense, past, present and future, a young cowpuncher, leggings rustling, spurs jingling, approached. He had been sitting to the rear, and it was a word from the barkeeper that started him. As he came up, those features most to be noticed in him were a lean, pleasant face and a rumpled letter, which latter he bore in his hand.

"Hanrahan says that you're my man," he remarked. "An' I was plenty pleased to hear it,

'cause it saves me three days' ride. It's from Frosty," he concluded, putting the letter into Moonlight's fingers.

Moonlight looked at the superscription. It read:

"Old Tom Moonlight, Dove's Nest on the Palo Duro, via 'Dobe Walls, Tascosa and the Cross-8."

"I guess it's mine," he said, and tore it open. The letter ran thus:

Dere frend:

This leaves me feelin' gay an' trusts to findin' you likewise. I'm in Austin turnin' farobank for the statesmen. I've been here three days, an' have already caught the Attorney Gen'ral for a thousand. I'm now ropin' at the State Treasurer, an' if I tie him down I expect to own Texas by the time I'm again on the Canadian. However, this ain't what I went trackin' out to tell.

You remember the young tenderfoot who was pervadin' 'round the Cross-8 on the day of the steer-throwin'? He's the maverick who bought the Bar-Z outfit. Well, the story's too long, but he's now in Austin with a scheme to do you up. The Register at the Land Office told me about it—he'd just called the turn for the limit, an' was feelin' friendly. He says this party has took out a patent—bought the title, you understand—to the section on which the Dove's Nest stands. That not only gives him your camp, but every spring an water-hole for an hour's ride around.

He's also staked a law-wolf, an' the two of 'em's got a paper from the court—the judge is a pard of mine, an plumb locoed to play monte—an' he's now p'intin' out to stampede you off the Palo Duro.

I'll say no more, as I'm offerin' two to one, an' go as far as they like, that when you get this you'll savey what to do. I send per hand of Joe Gatlin' of the Frying Pan Ranch, who belongs up your way. The hoss-thief tenderfoot, bearin' said papers, will be comin' up on the next stage after this reaches you. What better should you want than that? To me it looks like a push-over. Yours trooly,

FROSTY.

P. S. Things is down to a fine pass, if stray tenderfeet can come squanderin' into Texas unrebooked, to play the law on us. If that's the freedom for which our fathers fought and bled, I for one am ready to turn my box up, cash what chips is out, an' quit. F.

Moonlight read and re-read Frosty's singular letter; at the second reading a look, grim and set, began to mantle his face. He put a question to Mr. Wright.

"When is the next stage due from the East?"

"It ain't a reg'lar stage-coach," Mr. Wright explained; "it's a buckboard—two mules. It belongs to Scotty who's got the mail contract, but Locoed Charlie drives it. It goes once a week. When will it be in? Bar accidents, it's due to-morrow noon. What's the matter? Somebody you want to see coming up?"

"Yes; somebody I want to see very much." There was a dangerous dryness in the tone. "I think I'll ride out a mile or so and meet him. However, that's not until to-morrow. Meanwhile, let's go over to your store. There will be five thousand rounds of 50-caliber Sharp's cartridges to go out to the Dove's Nest with your mule teams, besides one thousand rounds of Colt's-45s."

## CHAPTER XV

### THE RESCUE IN THE SNOW

THE next morning about ten by Mr. Hanrahan's barroom clock, or as that merchant in rum would have phrased it, "at fourth drink time," Moonlight mounted President and turned his nose toward the East. That incoming buckboard, according to the veracious Frosty, should carry Robert—Robert, who was coming to drive him from the Dove's Nest! It was Robert whom Moonlight wanted to meet.

To one who, like himself, made an aggressive specialty of force, the situation was simple enough. Robert was his enemy by choice, seeking his harm in sly, unmanly ways. That Robert had the law on his side in no wise improved his position, but made it worse. The sentiment of the Panhandle sustained only the strong hand. The law was a trap—a gin—a snare, resorted to only by weak, scheming, criminal men, who possessed a vicious willingness to filch the goods of their neighbors, while wanting the stark hardihood to go personally about the villainy. By every custom of the region the Dove's Nest was his. To skulk to Austin and patent the title in himself was, on Robert's part, the trick of a caitiff. In its way, too, it was a tacit declaration of war. He, therefore, should not hesitate to confront the situation as became a man. He would shoot down Robert, or any

who stood in that wrongdoer's place, in defense of what were his rights. That one who would claim the Dove's Nest must come armed with something besides mere law. It would take more than a paper, bearing the seal of the land office, to wrest it from him. He was grateful for Frosty's warning. It came pat to the occasion. He could now deal with the invasion half way, and sharply settle the Dove's Nest ownership.

In brief the lowering determination of Moonlight was to stop the buckboard, and charge Robert with the treacherous enterprise that had taken him to Austin and was now bringing him back. The *casus belli* being outlined so that the whole world, including Locoed Charlie, would understand, Robert must fight. It should be war to the death. There should come a sure adjustment of the controversy. If he fell, Robert's path to the Dove's Nest would lie comparatively open. Were the fortunes of war to declare otherwise, then this hopeful scoundrel now coming up the trail would be too dead to press his claims. It was the old-time trial by battle, and Moonlight reverted to it as readily and as naturally as though he were living in the thirteenth century. The only difference would be a difference in weapons; it should be six-shooters instead of swords, knives instead of battle axes. But, since arms would be equal in the hands of each, this improving modern difference didn't count. These were Moonlight's ruminations as he paced slowly eastward in quest of his enemy—or should one say his prey?

About two miles out from the 'Dobe Walls grew a clump of plum bushes. Moonlight would wait there. The buckboard should be along now in half an hour.

To the south, a half mile away, a ragged rank of cottonwoods marked the course of the Canadian. To the east, for a distance of three miles, the trail proper lay open to the eye. Moonlight, in savage wait by the clump of plum bushes, would foresee the advent of the buckboard by fifteen minutes. As he stepped from the saddle, and loosened the bridle of President by way of permission to crop the grass, he ran his gaze along that three-mile yellow thread of trail. There was no moving thing in sight; the looked-for buckboard was still a creature of the future.

He let his mind rest casually on Locoed Charlie. He could have wished it had been Scotty himself, rather than his half-witted assistant. He wanted the impending war and its causes to be hereafter thoroughly understood by the Panhandle public; and he rightly feared that Locoed Charlie did not own enough intelligence to grasp the story. For all that he would go on; he was not to be balked because of the brainless sort of Locoed Charlie, and the Panhandle public, as it later gathered the details, would have to take the risk.

Gloomy, hard as iron, with never a relenting doubt to stay his hand, Moonlight waited by the plum bushes, his soul set on blood. He did not think once on the "Beautiful One," or consider what might be her feelings. Doubtless, Robert was in some sort near to her. Still, life in all its phases, was only one grand risk, and the "Beautiful One" for either joy or grief, was not exempt from the common chances of existence. The "Beautiful One" might be plunged in black mourning as the result of what he was so bloodily about! He never considered that, nor would it have held him if

he had. It was Robert who should have thought on those things. That scoundrel should have protected the sensibilities of the "Beautiful One"—assuming that she might care—by a frank, honorable, manly course of life. Those women folk that belonged with malefactors who would skulk to Austin to steal the house over a neighbor's head, lay, in all chance, wide open to grief. That, however, was the fault of the skulking one. Those at whom he aimed his wickedness should not sit quiet for that reason. Thus read Panhandle doctrine; and thus would have coursed the reflections of the sullen Moonlight had the contingency quoted occurred—which it didn't—to his mind.

The somber resolution visible in Moonlight's face, while he paused by those plum bushes, was only once relieved. The ghost of a smile chased across it to be gone in a moment; that was when his ruminations glanced for an instant on Jeff Horne and Red River Bill.

"If he should win over me," thought Moonlight —who possessed not a least intention of losing— "if he should win over me, I wish him joy of Red River and Uncle Jeff. Even with me gone, there would be blood on the Dove's Nest threshold and worse inside, before ever he took possession."

The day, for so late in the season, had been still and warm. Suddenly, a chill puff of wind struck Moonlight's cheek like ice. The puff came from the north. He looked quickly in that direction; a band of cloud, black as ink, belted the northern horizon. Aside from this cloudy strip of blackness the sky was as clear as a bell, with the sun beating vertically down.

There came a second icy puff; it was doubly chill by contrast with the warm dullness of the day. He kept his eye on the black strip to the north, which now began racing up the sky with the swiftness of a drawn curtain.

President came up nickering, ears pointed inquisitively.

"It's a norther sure enough, old boy," remarked Moonlight, as he readjusted the bridle. "But we've seen other blizzards in our time, and this bunch of plum bushes will stand our friend."

He glanced along the dusty yellow streak of trail. Excellent! There was what he sought—the buckboard just pushing into view, its lethargic mules at a sleepy trot. Even at a distance of three miles he made out two persons, no more.

"Two!" said he to himself. "The man I'm after is the only passenger."

While his eyes were following the approaching buckboard, the wind came in stronger puffs and there fell a flurry of snowflakes. The snowflakes were the white skirmish line thrown out by the onrushing norther, each as large and clinging as a pinch of wool. More flakes, and faster; with the wind on the increase. Moonlight took another look at the far-off buckboard; he could just make it out, a dim spot in the whirling, drifting whiteness of the storm. While his eyes were upon it, the snow thickened and shut it out.

The wild snow now came down in a cloud of clinging whiteness. The grass about the plum bushes was covered as with a blanket. The blanket grew visibly deeper—one inch, two inches, three! Moon-

light led President close against the leeward side of the clump of bushes, into which that profound beast ground and pushed his way to save himself from the drifting snow.

"This is the thickest I've ever seen it come down," was the mental comment of Moonlight.

The wind rose, and with it the cold! It was arctic, that cold—a thermometer, had one hung in those plum bushes, would have registered a fall of fifty points.

"I hope those buckboard mules," he muttered, "will be able to hold the trail. The storm is a trifle in their front, which is bad. However, they can't drift far to one side; the river and that fringe of cottonwoods will stop them."

There came a loud, astonished snort. He peered forth through the thick, dancing flakes. Dimly he made out the unwieldy bulk of a giant buffalo bull, who had headed for the shelter of the plum bushes, and was now greatly disconcerted to find them occupied by others. With the storm and the flakes that clung to his shaggy frontlet and blinded him, the buffalo bull might have mistaken Moonlight and President for members of his herd. But the wind brought him an enlightening whiff, and with a prodigious final snort he trotted off toward the river.

Five minutes, ten, fifteen, a half hour went by!—the wind and the snow continued. Moonlight stepped into the open, and found the drift piled midway to his knee.

"And yet they ought to make it!" he considered, turning his flake-blinded eyes in the direction of the hidden buckboard. "We could settle the question

of the Dove's Nest in a blizzard as readily as though the sun were shining. We'd only have to go a little closer."

An hour passed, and never a creaking sign of the buckboard, although Moonlight kept his ear on the strain. He looked at President doubtfully; the big bay pony was wrapped in a coat of white. At last, with the manner of a man whose decision is made, he led President out of the bushes. Brushing the snow from the deep saddle he mounted.

"We'll have to go after them," he said to President. "From the looks of things they're stalled. To let him freeze would be one way; but it's not the way I want this man to die."

President gave a plunge as he felt the unusual spur. Then off through the blinding, blocking tumble of drifts went man and pony. Sometimes the snow was girth deep, but they broke through. The snow and the wind whipped them, but they pressed on. They were in all things a match for the storm—this man and horse, framed of blood and fire and iron!

Moonlight had to feel his way. He guided himself somewhat by the storm, which he kept to his left. The lay of the land helped him, for it sloped gently upward to the north side of the trail. Still, in such a tempest, thick and white and freezing, it would have been easy to miss so small a thing as the buckboard. He might go within a rod of it and never be the wiser.

President, not he, discovered it at last. Of a sudden, President pulled up and fronted to the north. The snow whipped into his eyes; but he stood facing it none the less firmly, pawing with one forehoof, and tossing his head.

"Ah, old boy! you smell them!" cried Moonlight.

He urged President to advance in the teeth of the blast. They made progress, foot by foot, head down to escape the snow as much as might be. They hadn't far to go; the buckboard was not one hundred feet away when the keen nose of President gave notice. It was just as well it did; a moment later and the buckboard would have been left hopelessly behind.

The buckboard mules were standing, noses lowered, trace-deep in the snow, Locoed Charlie and Robert motionless in the single seat. The reins, and the long shotted mule whip were still in Locoed Charlie's fingers. The whole made a bulky mound of snow; for the drift reached half way to the mules' backs, and fell across and overflowed the side of the buckboard, covering the knees and the laps of the men.

Moonlight, President bounding and buck-jumping in the snow depths, rode round to the side of Locoed Charlie. He leaned from the saddle and shook him by the arm. Between snow flurries, he struck him and shouted in his ear. It was labor thrown away; Locoed Charlie and Robert were in the first dull sleep of death by freezing, and the only response to the shoutings and the shakings was a murmur of querulous protest by Locoed Charlie at having his dreams disturbed.

Moonlight reached out and took the heavy lead-filled whip from the benumbed hand of Locoed Charlie. Reining President back on his hocks, to get the distance, he sent the lash biting like the point of a knife into the sides and flanks of the snow-buried mules. There was more life in the mules than in

the men. The cruel lash, cracking like a pistol and taking off a piece of hide as big as a two-bit piece with every stroke, woke up the team as with a coal of fire. They made a scrambling start, and began to move.

Once free of the drift that had formed about them, the mules did better. Warmed by exercise, and maddened into highest life by the inveterate lash, they did better still. That thunderbolt of a man on the thunderbolt of a pony was so much more terrible than the storm, that the mules, afire from the pistol-cracking lash, forgot snow and wind, and fled before Moonlight at a gallop.

Sure of the mules, Moonlight fell back and, with energy scarcely modified, sent the lash curling about the half-frozen forms of Robert and Locoed Charlie. They proved duller cattle than the mules; but he stirred them. Locoed Charlie was the first to come around, and he cursed feebly as the lash fell across his shoulders like a live wire. At this, Moonlight returned upon the profane Charlie ten curses for his one, and fairly slashed the coats from the backs of both Robert and him. It was fierce work. He would charge forward and pour a storm of leather into the mules; then he would fall back and cut up Robert and Locoed Charlie as though they were a pair of convicts.

The most wonderful thing was that the flying mules never varied a rod to left or right of the trail. They were full four miles from the 'Dobe Walls when the lashing Moonlight unlocked them from that death-trance. Once started, he sent them over those four miles rather faster than the fat, lazy

mules were wont to cover it even in the best of weather.

Up through the swirl of the storm rose the black loom of the big outfitting store. Moonlight saw it, and launched a broadside of leather at mules and men by way of valedictory. He brought them into the 'Dobe Walls, reeling and plunging, reins under the galloping hoofs of the mules—the mules themselves a-drip with blood and perspiration, the men bruised and stung and cut to tatters.

Like one acknowledging defeat, the blizzard now began to abate. As the buckboard came to a halt in front of Mr. Hanrahan's saloon, the winds fell, the snow ceased, the air cleared, while the sun burst forth in a flood of brightness and showed the beaten storm in full retreat to the south.

Aunt Tilda, in her new responsibility as Robert's love-deputy, did not find her task a graceful one. It was less pleasant to speak to Ethel than she had supposed it would be. She was beginning to feel for one thing far from sure that Robert's proffer of a heart would be generously received. Those doubts which were aroused by Ethel's mendacious avoidance of Robert's request to bear him company for a short mile that day he left for Austin, had returned with double force. Her kindness had explained them away at the time by an argument of girlish coyness on Ethel's part. Aunt Tilda's earliest theory was that Ethel had refused to ride with Robert in a spirit of teasing coquetry.

But the subsequent jocund conduct of that baffling damsel did not bear out this assumption of coyness.

By every law of love, as remembered by Aunt Tilda, Ethel, following Robert's departure, should have moped and gloomed. That is she should have gloomed and moped, assuming for her a tenderness toward the departed one. Ethel did nothing of that dull and mournful sort. Her face was wreathed with all the smiles of May. She went joyously up and down, a laugh on her lips and a song in her throat. In the most shameless fashion, too, she had had the saddle on Jet before Robert was gone an hour, and the headlong manner in which she sent that ambitious mustang skurrying across the landscape rendered the story of her having wearied him to a panting standstill the day before an abject farce. All these symptoms were considered by Aunt Tilda, and in no one of them could she discern hope for Robert.

In her troubles she took counsel with the Professor.

"It will break Robert's heart," she concluded, "if Ethel should not return his love. Really, he wept as he spoke of her."

The good Professor found himself in a dilemma, out of which he crawled as best he might. He could pretend to no impressions concerning Ethel's love or lack of it for Robert. He was scientific, and had been thinking on other things. Now that the business was mentioned, however, he could not dodge the hope that Ethel despised Robert, as he did. For he held her, with her heart of gold and that wisdom which had so lately bewildered him, as much too good for Robert.

"The boy's not worthy of her!" thought the Professor, while Aunt Tilda talked. "He isn't fit to touch her fingers, for all he's half a Gordon! It would

be a manifest wrong to waste so brilliant a mind on such a palterer."

The Professor would have perished where he stood rather than give Aunt Tilda a guess at these views. He was too careful of her feelings for that. She loved Robert, if Ethel did not, and the Professor wouldn't have wounded that love for the world. Moreover, he had his own standing with Aunt Tilda to think about.

Being wily in an old-school, gentlemanly way, the Professor went to one side, and lectured on tears. Aunt Tilda had said that Robert wept; the wary Professor, seeking to avoid the issue of Ethel's love, took those lamentations as his text. Tears proved nothing, he said, when one undertook to measure feeling. Tears were a matter of temperament. The deepest grief was ofttimes dry of eye. Also, the Professor had known grief to be a question of digestion; tears might find their sources in cheese or suet pudding.

"Beyond that, my dear Madam," quoth the Professor, "I myself attach but little instructive importance to tears. They prove nothing but themselves. For, even granting them an origin above mince pies and cheese, they are generally the result of selfishness. Folk weep at a grave, not for the dead but for themselves. It is their loss, not his, which they mourn."

Aunt Tilda listened in sincere impatience to the word-ramblings of the astute Professor. She said they were beside the point, and in nowise met her question. She must tell Ethel of Robert's love; she had asked the Professor how to set about it. And all she received in response was a lecture on digestion, and the grievous possibilities that rankled in pies and

puddings, to close with a dissertation on the hypocrisy of graveyard tears. She thought the Professor disingenuous, and was surprised by it. Perhaps he did not care to talk on love, as a topic trivial and beneath him!

The Professor cast upon Aunt Tilda a shy, wistful look.

"Talk on love, my dear Madam!" he cried, while his cheek flushed like a boy's. "Now there is one love I could talk on forever!—one heart that I should like to put in your charge through all eternity!"

It was Aunt Tilda's turn to color. Still, she displayed not a little address at this crisis.

"Now I," she replied, lifting her hand to warn the Professor, who seemed to be coming too close—"now I am like a lawyer who will take but one case at a time. I shall refuse to hear a second love story until I've disposed of poor Robert's. Of course," she concluded, letting her softened glance rest kindly on the Professor, "once that is off my hands, I will not say but what I might listen to another."

"My dear Madam!" began the Professor, in a state of exclamatory ecstasy.

The fat little hand went up.

"There!" she said, "I've no more time now."

With this Aunt Tilda left the room, while the Professor, seizing his hat, issued forth in the greatest excitement to call the stars his brothers and to walk the air

## CHAPTER XVI

### AUNT TILDA TRIES A STAMPEDE

Aunt Tilda waited for an opportunity to speak with Ethel alone. She would have said before she sought the chance, that a score of openings would present themselves in the course of any afternoon. It impressed her to find, when now she went looking for them, that not one arose. Ethel was either abroad with Jet or, if indoors, close by the sheltering side of the worthy Professor.

"I really believe she knows," thought Aunt Tilda, and the thought disconcerted her.

At last, through an exercise of strategy that should have led an army to a successful field and back, she got Ethel by herself. Even then she was for the moment baffled. Ethel did all the talking. Aunt Tilda could no more bring her to bay than she could have brought a partridge to bay.

Aunt Tilda's wits were by no means the dullest in the Panhandle. She fully appreciated those shifts of Ethel to keep the upper hand in the conversation and select the subjects. To be sure, as to the latter, Ethel offered a generous range; but she never presented one that by any chance should lead the talk within a verbal mile of love. Aunt Tilda might have admired Ethel's sly skill in avoiding what was uppermost on her own tongue, if she had been less sensi-

tively earnest in the cause of Robert. As it was, she did not fail of drawing certain discouraging inferences.

"She plainly understands," thought Aunt Tilda, "and it's also quite as plain that she wishes to escape."

Again Aunt Tilda fell to marveling that Ethel should seem so well aware of what was in her heart. Being herself a woman, she should not have fallen a prey to such astonishment. Women are by instinct love-wise, and to put questions concerning that love-wisdom, and the reasons thereof, would be like questioning the robins as to why they fly southward in the fall.

Ethel gave a new slant to Aunt Tilda's amazement. Abruptly and of her own motion she began to talk of love. Only she spoke—apparently—with unconscious innocence, and altogether in the abstract.

"I've been reading a book," began Ethel—"a book full of love heresies; or, I should say, marriage heresies. Actually, the author says that marriage has nothing to do with love or love with marriage! Now did you ever hear anything more preposterously cold-blooded, aunt? How could one marry where one didn't love?"

"What was the story?" returned Aunt Tilda craftily.

She thought she saw an opening in the conversational distance through which she might later squeeze Robert and his bleeding heart.

"Oh, the story," replied Ethel, "is hardly worth retelling. But you cannot conceive, aunt, of its stupidity concerning marriage! Now to me, for one to

marry where one didn't love, would be the grossest sin. Don't you think so, Aunt?"

Ethel made the appeal with round, confident virgin eyes, sure that her good Aunt Tilda must perforce entertain an equally virtuous view. She ran on without waiting for an answer.

"I know I should die if I were made to give my hand where I hadn't given my heart."

While Ethel, the unaccountable, thus went preaching on love and wedlock, Aunt Tilda was not free from disquieting meditations. This sudden, not to say phenomenal frankness on the maiden's part bothered her. Aunt Tilda did not recall any prior occasion when she had so much as named the name of love. That she should now speak of it, all things considered, was of itself enough to teach Aunt Tilda that this unexpected candor concealed a purpose; and, as she read the stars, that purpose could be nothing other than just to stifle every first suggestion of the love-worn Robert.

"If she loved him," sighed Aunt Tilda, who felt all the pain that Robert might have felt had he been present and pleading his cause in person, "she would be ready and eager to hear."

Aunt Tilda's sense of duty was among her most formidable characteristics. Also, her diplomacy, being by nature direct, leaned heavily on the axiom that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. She had been saddled with the weight of Robert's lovesick destinies, and she determined, come what would, to put them to the test. Also, when all was in, she must not forget that Ethel's happiness should be and was as dear to her as Rob-

ert's. This final reflection brought a ray of comfort.

Having resolved to unveil the love-future of Robert, either for black or for white, she began directly:

"This is the first time you ever spoke of love."

There was a rising inflection, like a question.

Ethel looked askance. The attack was coming, and she felt a little frightened.

"It wasn't very delicate," she returned apologetically.

Aunt Tilda began measuring in her own mind the value of surprise. Should she set a trap? At the Cross-8 she had heard a stampede described. Would it not be well to stampede Ethel with some production of the unexpected? In that way the stampeded one might be made to disclose her true feeling.

"Do you know what I think?"

Aunt Tilda bent a softly meaning glance on Ethel. The glance alarmed the young lady. In the uncertainty bred of that look she could not avoid a flutter. What could be her good Aunt Tilda's aim?

The good but disconcerting Aunt Tilda went on:

"You are in love!"

Aunt Tilda got this off in tones of confident motherly complacency; and, since she was not at all confident or complacent, it was the more to her credit as an actress. Not that she would mislead Ethel; she was only striving to surprise her, hoping, as has been stated, many favorable things from a sentimental stampede on that evanescent damsel's part.

There arose much in the immediate sequence to flatter Aunt Tilda's hopes. Upon that direct accu-

sation of love, coupled with the soft stare, Ethel reddened to the roots of her hair.

"Now," thinks the gentle promoter of stampedes, "I shall get at her heart."

It may be that she did. For, even as she gazed, the young convicted face took fire; Ethel's eyes suddenly filled up, and she began to sob.

"What makes you say that?" she cried. "It's of Robert you've been thinking from the first. I don't love him! I shall never love him—my heart won't let me! Why should you say I'm in love?"

Ethel, all tears and blushes, buried her glowing face in Aunt Tilda's lap.

The good Aunt Tilda was now the puzzled one. The surprise had succeeded, the stampede was complete! The mystery, however, only deepened. Surely, there was nothing in what she had said to justify such a blushing breaking down! Aunt Tilda could see the crimson spread and spread until lost in the roots of Ethel's dark hair. What did it mean? Aunt Tilda couldn't tell. The question went too deep for her. If there were any solution, it must be that Ethel loved, not Robert, but some one else. And what could be a wilder assumption? The thing was impossible. Who was there for her to love?

Ethel sobbed on with hidden face, nor did the crimson fade from her neck. Aunt Tilda uttered no comment, offered no question. She only stroked with both gentle hands Ethel's glossy braids.

The sobs ceased; the stampede was over. Still Ethel did not lift her face.

Aunt Tilda was musing sympathetically, and somewhat sadly, on the heart-problem unfolded, when, as

a quail scuttles for covert, Ethel arose and left the room. Aunt Tilda did not detain her nor call her back. Why should she? Robert had received his answer. Ethel would never marry Robert. She could not help grieving as the conviction entered her soul, and she reflected upon Robert's sorrow.

"None the less," thought the astute Aunt Tilda, "she loves; and that is the wonderful part."

Aunt Tilda was so much the woman that she told the Professor.

"Poor Robert!" concluded Aunt Tilda. "But there's no help—she doesn't love him; that was evident from the beginning."

The Professor grew incautiously radiant. Aunt Tilda detected the radiance, and her brows descended with a falcon trick they had when she was about to rebuke her old admirer.

"You seem pleased, Professor Doremus."

"Not at all, my dear Madam!" hastily returned the guilty savant, frightened to the core that Aunt Tilda should give him his name. Experience had taught him to look on that as a most baleful portent. "Not at all, I assure you! What you saw was surprise."

Aunt Tilda passed over the radiance without further reproof. She was too full of the mystery of Ethel's heart to be deflected by little things. Besides, she could take up the punishment of the pleased Professor later.

"The strange thing," resumed Aunt Tilda, "is that she is none the less in love."

This was said slowly, and with an air of reflective introspection, as though Aunt Tilda were mentally calling the roll of what males might furnish the name

of that fortunate one who had found the way to Ethel's affections. It was clear by her manner that the list was short. Following a moment's reflection, Aunt Tilda refastened her questioning gaze on the Professor.

"Absolutely, I can think of no one!" she said, with a sort of kindly despair.

The Professor made no response, but maintained a politely receptive, albeit non-committal manner.

"What would you advise?" asked Aunt Tilda, finally.

"What should I advise?" repeated the Professor, driven to say something. "I think, my dear Madam, that all things considered I should advise a still hunt. Say nothing to Ethel. She is young, sensitive—as indeed are all brilliant intellects. Rest secure that when she does speak, she will come first to you—you who have ever been her nearest friend."

"But, Professor, isn't it my duty to question her?"

"I think not." This gravely: "There is, my dear Madam, a class of people ever ready to inflict pain, and call it duty. I might add that I never knew any of them to inflict pleasure and call it duty. Believe me, you are not of that class. It would not be like your good heart to say anything that made Ethel uneasy. More than that, she won't show you her secret until she is ready. Questioning wouldn't wring it from her; for, as I read faces, Ethel can be exceeding obstinate if she will. You've learned what was after all the object of your search: She doesn't love Robert. For a space at least I should let the matter rest there."

Aunt Tilda was much led by the Professor's long

speech. His words never failed of weight with her, and she accepted them now. She made no further attempt to sound the depths of Ethel's feeling. Those blushes must go untranslated, until Ethel herself saw fit to hand her the key to them.

When Aunt Tilda next met Ethel, she made no reference to that discussion on love so sobbingly broken off. Neither did she again bring up the cause of Robert.

Ethel was notably silent for a day or two, but gave no other sign of embarrassment. True, her eyes did turn furtively defensive on one or two occasions when her aroused suspicions, from some act or word of Aunt Tilda, led her to fear a return to that talk on love and Robert; and the red, full lips lined themselves in bitter firmness, awaiting the assault.

Aunt Tilda observed these symptoms, even while she skillfully pretended otherwise.

"The Professor was right," she thought. "Ethel could be decisively stubborn."

## CHAPTER XVII

### MR. HANRAHAN DELIVERS A MESSAGE

THE Panhandle cultivates action at the expense of words, and ever does more than it says. When the buckboard mules pulled up short in front of Mr. Hanrahan's saloon, a dozen ready hands seized Robert and Locoed Charlie, and bore them not tenderly but promptly—which was of more consequence—into the barroom. No one exclaimed; no one questioned. So far as any overt expression of wonder or curiosity went, one might have supposed that the advent of two half-frozen, half-senseless gentlemen, with coats cut to rags, who made their appearance on a galloping buckboard, was an every-day experience at the 'Dobe Walls. Once inside, the ready-handed ones applied rum.

Local belief held by a theory that, whatever the malady, from gunshot wounds to a cold in the head, the sovereign remedy was rum. Robert and Locoed Charlie, therefore, were copiously subjected to that restorative.

Locoed Charlie, inured to the weather as well as the cures of the Panhandle, rapidly revived under this treatment, and was shortly his former old-time addle-pated self.

"He's the same hopeless eediot he was," said Mr. Hanrahan, who had borne a foremost part and in

truth donated the rum. "Wherefore I pronounces him out o' danger."

Robert, of lesser stamina and a constitution never robust, did not display Locoed Charlie's recuperative powers. It took double the time and rum called for by his fellow-sufferer to bring him about. At that, he no sooner emerged from the lethargy of the snow than he fell before the awful power of the medicine. But with this difference: whereas it took but two hours to save him from the snow, it was long into the next day before he was rescued from the rum.

The morning following that rescue in the snow Moonlight saddled and mounted President. The trails were bad and the ford perilous, but neither Merchant Wright nor Mr. Hanrahan tendered any opinions against his westward departure for the Dove's Nest. When a man has attained to full Panhandle standing, it isn't good form to give him advice, and Mr. Hanrahan and Merchant Wright, in the thorough paced instance of Moonlight, wouldn't have dreamed of such a vulgarity.

As Moonlight made ready to give President his head, Mr. Hanrahan brought up the name of Robert. He, as well as Merchant Wright, had not failed to observe that Moonlight neither spoke of Robert nor sought to see him, after bestowing upon him and Locoed Charlie a final cut of that saving mule-whip. Wearing this in his mind, and being one whose native politeness had been polished and intensified in a region that went armed to the teeth, Mr. Hanrahan mentioned Robert with a world of prudence. It was safe to assume that since Moonlight hadn't spoken of Robert, he might not care to hear another name him.

"As to the gent inside," observed Mr. Hanrahan carelessly. "Any word for him, Cap'n? Nacherally, when he's come to from that rum we lavishes on him, he'll ast who rounds him up."

"If he asks," replied Moonlight, as though ready with his answer, "tell him that it was I who brought him in. You might as well; if you don't, some one else will."

"Which he shore owes you his gratitoode!" exclaimed Mr. Hanrahan.

"That's the point," went on Moonlight grimly. "Tell him he need feel no gratitude—give me no thanks. Say to him that I once killed a Cheyenne who was about to kill a buffalo, and then killed the buffalo myself."

"I'll shore say it," returned Mr. Hanrahan, "so that every word 'll trickle into him, an' not a one be lost."

"What do you reckon he means by that parable, Ned?" asked Merchant Wright when Mr. Hanrahan, in confidence over a couple of rums, repeated the Moonlight message. "I don't see any trail through, myself."

"Nor me neither," responded Mr. Hanrahan, sipping his rum and getting no enlightenment therefrom. "To my mind, Bob, that message is one of them 'nigmas, an' I quits it."

"I'll gamble Old Tom Moonlight knew what it meant when he framed it up," said Merchant Wright, replacing his empty glass on the bar. "As you give it to this tenderfoot, Ned, watch his face sharp."

"Good idee!" returned Mr. Hanrahan heartily, being as full of curiosity as caution, "good idee, Bob!

Shove that bottle, an' let's take another drink on it."

When Robert was able to see and hear and talk lucidly, he complained of pains in his chest and head. The pains in the head alarmed no one, it being remembered that he was a tenderfoot, fresh from a feeble East, and unused to the liquors of a buffalo country. The pain in the chest might have a darker meaning. The local conclusion was fairly voiced by Mr. Hanrahan.

"You see, boys," said that publican, addressing the citizenry of the 'Dobe Wall, in all seven souls including Merchant Wright, "you see, boys, my rum has considerable body, and most likely the headache is doo to them libations. Now as to said aches in his lungs I ain't so shore. He's a mighty puny substitoote for a man, an' it's plumb inside the bettin' that he ups an' has pnoomonia as the froots of this. Which he looks plenty pulmonary, that-away—this Bar-Z person does!"

"That's whatever!" said Joe Gatling.

Robert was not present when his condition was thus discussed. Although his wits and his blood had resumed their wonted activities, he felt weak and dizzy, and had gone back to the blanket couch prepared for him in Mr. Hanrahan's back room. He went the more readily, since he was assured by a no less expert opinion than Merchant Wright's that the snow, which was now melting almost as rapidly as it had fallen, would so swell the river that to talk of trying the Tascosa ford was merest madness.

"Stop right here with Ned Hanrahan and me," said Mr. Wright emphatically. "It's the best you

can do. If you were to blunder into the ford in its present shape, you wouldn't last as long as a dollar at roulette."

"But what am I to do?" complained Robert. "I've pressing business at the Cross-8 ranch."

"It 'll have to wait," returned Mr. Wright. "Here you must stay until Scotty arrives. That ought to be only a matter of days. When Scotty shows up, he'll rig you out with something, and put you as far as the Cross-8."

"Where is the driver with whom I came?"

"Locoed Charlie? Oh, he lost so much time foolin' round in that norther, he had to start east again this morning."

Robert groaned.

"You might as well take it easy," counseled Mr. Wright, who had been so long in the West that he accepted with philosophy such exigencies as blizzards, swollen fords, broken axletrees, rum and other interruptions to travel. "That's my word; take it easy!"

Moonlight had been gone four hours, and, despite the snow that still obstructed the trail in many melting drifts, was already half way to Tascosa.

"I have a foggy recollection," said Robert feebly to the attentive Mr. Hanrahan, "of some one lashing us through the storm."

"Which it's a heap nacheral you-all should," said Mr. Hanrahan encouragingly, "seein' that Old Tom Moonlight wore out a twelve-foot blacksnake on you an' Locoed Charlie."

"Was it this man Moonlight?" asked Robert, a bit huskily. "Did he save my life?"

"That's what they'd call it, I reckon, back in the East."

"Where is he?" asked Robert, after a dubious wait.

"Which he's gone. But he leaves a word for you in case you takes to expressin' gratitood an' thanks—him savin' your life that-away."

"A word?"

"He lays a heap of stress on the impropri'ty of feelin' grateful. Looks like he's kind o' sot ag'in you, an' so he declines in advance to be cumbered with your thanks. Likewise I'm to say that once, havin' fixed his heart on killin' a partic'lar buffalo, he ups an' stretches an Injun who's goin' to down it; after which, said savage bein' rubbed out, he bowls over the bull himse'f."

This latter conversation took place in the half-dark of Mr. Hanrahan's rear room. In spite of the half-dark, however, and the added drawback of Robert's native paleness, Mr. Hanrahan declared later that he lost color.

"Which of course, Bob," observed Mr. Hanrahan, who made a specialty of candor, "he don't lose much because he ain't got much to lose. Still, I reemarks some additional whiteness about the gills."

"And he don't say anything?" asked Merchant Wright.

"Never peeped! Jest turns over on his blankets so 's to hide his face, an' goes to thinkin' it over."

Moonlight's message, obscure and yet ominous, troubled Robert. He twisted the tangle of it in his thoughts. It was as Greek; none the less he could smell a threat in it.

"And yet," thought Robert, "it isn't possible that

he should know! Unless"—and here he broke into a cold sweat—"unless Don Anton has let the secret out. But no; that is beyond belief! He hates the man, and would keep our plans close. As for Pedro of the Knife, that pet assassin of Don Anton is with the Kiowas."

Robert strove to reassure himself; but do what he would a chill fear, like a snake, coiled itself about his heart. There was menace in that message. Either it meant nothing, or it threatened his life. It forestalled his gratitude and refused it. The man who had saved his life wanted none of his thanks, and told him so. This aided the theory that mischief was afoot in that otherwise foolish allegory of the buffalo. He had saved Robert's life, that he himself might later have the joy of taking it! What else?

Robert frightened himself with these surmises, until his coward heart was sick with them. However, he must go forward as he and Don Anton had planned. It was now too late to withdraw. Besides, weak as he was and craven, Robert would dare much rather than lose the Gordon fortune. If this Moonlight, who was young Alan, had learned of the fortune that waited for his coming in old Somerset, it made the greater reason for acting swiftly. He must get back to Don Anton; get back to the Bar-Z with speed. By discovering what Don Anton knew, as well as what Aunt Tilda and the others knew, he might gain some half-clear knowledge of the present trend of events. He could then guess as to what new facts had come into the possession of that hated one who stood so much in his way.

"And to think," groaned Robert, "that I, who left

the Chesapeake to avoid him, should by that move bring him to light! Was ever man so cursed? Unless removed, this savage Alan will wrest from me the Gordon fortune! He has but to discover himself, and I am lost—unless—unless Don Anton and his Kiowas can save me."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE PROFESSOR ENCOUNTERS JEFF

It was only a matter of days, as Merchant Wright had foretold, when Scotty, the government mail contractor, came down from Tascosa. The days had seemed as so many ages to Robert, who was nervously eager to see Don Anton. He felt surrounded by dark uncertainties, the mildest of them a deadly peril.

"Would Scotty take him to the Cross-8?"

Scotty was in no sort hard to deal with. He would convey Robert as far as Tascosa, and leave it to an underling to take him from Tascosa to the Cross-8.

"You see," explained Scotty, "the Red Bull an' me ain't what you-all might term thick as thieves. For which reason I don't care, personal, to introode on his privacy. However, one of my drivers will freight you over, so it's all the same."

Scotty, in elaboration, stated that the coolness between himself and the Red Bull dated from that time long before when he, Scotty, criticised the beauty of the Red Bull's Mexican wife.

"Which he never likes them remarks," said Scotty; "an' while the Red Bull ain't much on revenge, preferrin' a quiet life, he's a gent who never forgets nor forgives. I says all this, as I thinks it doo you to explain why I quits your company at Tascosa. I don't want you-all to regyard the swap of drivers as invidious."

"I shall understand," returned Robert, who would have willingly missed the talkative Scotty's apologies. "In fact, I'm the last to ask any gentleman to go where he might get into trouble."

"Me? Trouble? The Red Bull?" Scotty blew through his warlike nose ferociously. "Now I shore like that! Why, stranger, if I thought my goin' to the Cross-8 would get a rise outen the Red Bull, I'd hook up an' start now! No; you've got him guessed wrong. The Red Bull 'buffaloes' them Mexicans of his; but if a clean strain white man was to show up in front of him, he'd take water like a mink."

"But I thought," interrupted Robert hurriedly, not a trifle disconcerted at the thought that he had offended the important Scotty, "that you said you didn't want to meet Captain Ruggles."

"Not through fear," observed Scotty in a high key of correction; "delicacy! Which I'm too delicate to go pirootin' 'round where the sight of me breeds disagreeable mem'ries. If the Red Bull gets a glimpse of me, it's bound to make him think of that former Mexican wife; and, while no one that I knows of fears him, I'm too much of a Christian gent myse'f to make even an enemy suffer onreasonable."

Robert said nothing to this, and the differences subsisting between Scotty and the Red Bull were permitted to fall to the floor.

"Be ready to-morry mornin'," said Scotty, as he turned into Mr. Hanrahan's bar. "Which we'll pull out about second drink time."

"Eight o'clock, he means," said Merchant Wright interpreting. The colloquy took place in his emporium, and he understood Robert's look of fog.

"You'll start at eight; and that should land you in Tascosa by dark. The next day will set you down at the Cross-8."

Robert was by no means a hale man. That pain in the chest increased, or rather it held its aching own in a sullen, stubborn way, and the learned Mr. Hanrahan still feared a worst result.

"It may not come off for a month yet," he said to Merchant Wright; "that pnoomonia I means. But, you hear me, Bob! that blizzard puts a crimp into this Blainey party what's goin' to carry him off."

As the buckboard made ready for a start, Mr. Hanrahan appeared with a gallon jug of rum.

"You may need it," said the kindly Mr. Hanrahan to Robert.

Robert thanked Mr. Hanrahan, but remonstrated against the rum. He said it made him ill.

"Chuck it aboard, Ned!" interposed Scotty, gathering up the reins. He was no one to leave a jug of rum behind. "Chuck it aboard! You can gamble I'll see that he takes it at proper intervals."

Scotty did not keep this compact with Mr. Hanrahan, who, relying on it, sent the rum along. Instead, Scotty saw that he, himself, took that remedy at highly improper intervals, and as an upcome, drove into Tascosa about sundown, singing of liberty and the glories of a republic.

The next afternoon saw Robert at the Cross-8. He drew a long, albeit painful breath of relief, for those aches held by him with malignant loyalty, and he felt as might Magellan when he had circumnavigated the globe.

Robert found Don Anton waiting, his shoulder out of its bandages. There is such a commodity in nature as the law of compensation. The Panhandle may be quick at inflicting wounds; it is just as quick at healing them, and Don Anton's knife-pierced shoulder was now as good as new. Also, he was fumingly impatient to go upon that congenial business of vengeance.

"Did you bring the paper?" queried Don Anton, the moment he could get Robert alone.

"It is here," replied Robert, putting into the dark, slim hands of Don Anton a document which he took from his pocket. "There it is in black and white: 'Blainey against Moonlight.' Here, too, is the patent for the land. It covers the square mile—a full section in fact—on which the Dove's Nest stands."

"You're sure?"

"I have the word of the best lawyer in Austin. Besides, they knew in the land office the section that had held the old trading post."

"*Bueno!*" cried Don Anton, running over the papers. "They are very necessary. That fool Pedro of the Knife would be willing to play sheriff, or assassin, or anything we please without the papers. But for myself, and particularly since we are in Texas and not in New Mexico where I live, I prefer to have them. Then when this Moonlight is blotted out, we can show that he was in the wrong and we in the right."

"I thought you said," observed Robert tremulously, "that the work would be done by Kiowas, and later be laid at their door."

"So I did! So it will! However, Indians some-

times tell their agents, and it is best to be ready with explanations."

"The Kiowas will do the work?"

"They were not so ready as I could wish. I had thought they would be headlong to revenge Sun Boy, whom this Moonlight knifed. But no; the scoundrels said that Sun Boy died a long time ago, and their hearts had forgotten him. Besides, they pointed out that his death was fair. It took a wagon-load of calico and blankets and tobacco and rum, and all the eloquence of Pedro of the Knife, to bring them to terms."

"But they have agreed?"

"It is settled! I have had word from him, and Pedro of the Knife will bring a band of the young fighting bucks across the Canadian whenever we are ready."

"And that will be when?"

"One week from to-day. I shall send a messenger to-night, and tell Pedro of the Knife."

"You are sure we can rely on them?" asked Robert, whose heart could ever be depended upon to turn weak at a crisis.

"Have courage, *Amigo!*" returned Don Anton, not without the suggestion of a sneer. "Those who will follow Pedro of the Knife across the Canadian are one and all his blood relatives. They are brothers, nephews, and cousins of his mother. Rest sure, he would never start unless he were as certain of them as he is of himself."

Robert planned to go on to the Bar-Z. The week that would intervene before Pedro of the Knife, in his unusual rôle of peace-officer, together with his

unique *posse comitatus* of Kiowas, descended upon the Dove's Nest, gave him ample time.

Don Anton was inclined to oppose his going to the Bar-Z.

"It would be better if you stayed here until it is over," he argued.

Robert, however, wouldn't listen. He must see Aunt Tilda, and discover whether anything had been uncovered during his absence that should have taught either her or "the runagate Alan"—as Robert invariably dubbed Moonlight in his thoughts—their blood relationship to one another, and per consequence the estate in old Somerset waiting so patiently the coming of the heir. He must be clear on that point. That word of obscure menace, delivered by the mouth of Mr. Hanrahan, continued to haunt him. Therefore, he must go to the Bar-Z. He pledged his word with Don Anton to return by the fourth day.

"About Captain Ruggles!" suddenly exclaimed Robert. He had not thought of the Red Bull, and the attitude of that person was important. "Does he know of our design?"

"He has purposely kept himself in ignorance. It is all right! He will not help; neither will he hurt our enterprise. So that none of his people are involved, and the skirts of the Cross-8 are kept clear, he does not care."

"Did you speak to him?"

"I attempted to, but he begged me to desist. 'I don't want to hear,' said he. 'You know my motto: Let every man kill his own snakes!' But he's with us passively; for you must know that the pony Pedro

of the Knife was riding, when he became Pedro of the Ear, wore the Cross-8 brand; and this Moonlight, on seeing it, said some things about the Red Bull that struck the latter gray."

Robert proposed an early morning start for the Bar-Z; but as events befell he didn't make it. That night the pains in his lungs were multiplied by ten; he choked, and drew his breath with difficulty. A fever set furiously in, and there were moments when his mind wandered.

The Red Bull was in deep concern. Like Mr. Hanrahan and those practitioners of the 'Dobe Walls, he pinned his faith to rum. The solicitous Red Bull gave Robert unlimited rum, detailed a brace of servitors to keep watch and watch over his ravings, and sent word to the Bar-Z. In the morning, instead of Robert riding away to Aunt Tilda, the Red Bull's courier, who had spurred a pony to a standstill carrying the word, was telling her of his dangerous plight.

Aunt Tilda, her heart in her throat at the thought of Robert's peril, began at once to make ready for the journey to the Cross-8. Any sickness was in its way a challenge to the sympathetic Aunt Tilda, which she invariably accepted. That it was her beloved Robert who lay stricken, made the challenge peremptory. Within the half-hour after receiving the Red Bull's word of Robert's illness, Aunt Tilda and the Professor in the surrey, with Cato to drive, and Ethel on Jet, were on their way to the Cross-8. Once arrived, Aunt Tilda was quickly at the pillow of the smitten one, and thereafter she hardly left it night or day.

"I'm sorry," explained the Red Bull to the Professor, for he felt as though he wanted to report to somebody, "but I had nothing but rum to give him. As for a doctor, there isn't one nearer than Dodge, and the round trip would take a month."

"Rum!" repeated the Professor. "I have ever heard it spoken of as matchless for maladies that touch the lungs."

The Red Bull felt easier. He looked for Robert's death; and, being a sensitive spirit, he did not want it thought that he, with his prescriptions of rum, had contributed to bring it about.

"Rum is what we use on the Canadian," returned the Red Bull doubtfully; "but I confess it doesn't always cure. However, we must hope for the best."

Ethel and the Professor rendered what aid they might to Aunt Tilda, in her self-appointed duties as Robert's nurse. However, there was little they could do; they must wait the climax of the disease, disposing of their hours meanwhile as they best might. Ethel, while distressed as much for Aunt Tilda as for Robert, put in the time very well with the sprightly Doña Inez.

The lonely Professor, between whom and the Red Bull there was little in common, and who cared for Don Anton nothing at all, didn't fare so happily. He wandered about the Cross-8 like an uneasy ghost, and in the end saddled Socrates—who performed not only as the Professor's charger, but as the off mule in the surrey team—and began to roam the region round about.

It was the third day at the Cross-8, when the Pro-

fessor decided to push his explorations to the eastward. Mounted on the faithful Socrates, he followed the Canadian until, passing the first point of rocks, he found himself in that grove of cottonwoods wherein had stood the lodge of Ironjacket. The Professor recognized his surroundings, and remembered the grove's former inhabitants. He resolved upon a morning call on Ironjacket.

"Perchance, I might find him more communicative," thought the Professor, recalling the wooden taciturnity of Ironjacket on the only occasion when he beheld him. "In any event, there are the wife and daughter—Firewind and Southlight, I believe Mr. Horne called them! The daughter Southlight was extremely pleasing."

The Professor crossed the cottonwood grove and, after a little search, found the dead ashes of Ironjacket's camp-fire.

"These ashes are very old," observed the Professor, whose habit it was when alone to hold long talks with himself. "Those interesting savages have evidently been gone from this spot for months. Yes" —here the Professor looked about him—"even the last trace of their skin house has been obliterated."

The Professor sighed, and mounting Socrates kept on toward the Monk's Hill, the phlegmatic Socrates at a walk. He was on that stretch of the trail that lay between the toe of the Monk's Hill and the river. His thoughts were running sadly; for the Professor had social instincts, and a chat with the Ironjacket family would have pleased him vastly.

"They were such children of nature," mused the Professor. "So artless, so simple, so unconventional!

And the daughter, Southlight!—I thought her a pleasing girl!"

Something scuttered through the grass and knocked the bark from the root of a cottonwood, just where it entered the ground. Almost at the same moment came the crack of a rifle.

"Ah!" said the Professor, "some hunter gunning. He shot rather close to Socrates and myself! An accident of course! I do not, however, discern the animal at which he aimed."

Since the Professor was domiciled at the Bar-Z, he had so far yielded to the customs of the Panhandle as to don a wide-spreading cow hat and carry a rifle on those jaunts which he took in company with the invaluable Socrates. Once or twice he had brought home an antelope, and his bosom swelled with primitive pride as he presented it to Aunt Tilda.

"A little trophy of the chase, my dear Madam," he would say. "Permit me to lay it at your feet."

Aunt Tilda was wont on those gallant occasions to thank the Professor, say he was a perfect Nimrod, and close the incident by requesting him, instead of laying his trophy at her feet, to take it to the kitchen and deliver it into the hands of the Mexican cook.

The Professor, now when his ears were gladdened by the report of the rifle, brought his own Winchester briskly to the fore, cocked it with a resounding "kluck-kluck!" and peered about him. If the hunter who fired the shot had missed, then he, the Professor, would remedy the mishap with his Winchester. The difficulty was that, peer about as he might, he could see no moving wild creature at which to shoot.

"Strange!" he exclaimed. "Certainly the person, whoever he is, shot at something."

Even as he spoke a second bullet scuttered through the grass not ten feet from the learned nose of Socrates, and chipped another piece of bark from a second cottonwood. The Professor's eyes followed the line of the bullet to the south and east. There, about six hundred yards away, in a halo of blue smoke, stood Jeff Horne.

"Bless me!" cried the Professor. "It's Mr. Horne! How interesting! I shall find company after all."

The Professor drove his heels into the flanks of Socrates, and, to the scandal of that sleepy animal, urged him to a canter. He made straight for Jeff, who was so overcome at the spectacle that he even forgot to reload his buffalo gun, and now stood gazing at the oncoming scientist with hand-shaded eyes.

"Well, I'm a Siwash," exclaimed Jeff in profound amazement, "if it ain't the Professor! You must pardon me, my dear sir. I shore took you for a Mexican, or I'd never gone to cuttin' up the grass permiscus about the hoofs of your mule."

"Then you were shooting at Socrates and me!" returned the astonished Professor. "May I crave the reason of this outrage, sir?"

The Professor's eye flashed, and the muzzle of the Winchester began to cover Jeff Horne. That gentleman, so far from being discouraged by these symptoms, viewed them with the utmost delight.

"Babes an' sucklings!" shouted Jeff. "He's as game as a trant'ler, I do believe!" he cried, with a kind of ecstasy; "he'd drill me if I so much as

bats an eye or wags a y'ear! Professor, I'm proud I knows you! You're shorely four kings an' an ace!"

"Whether I'm the hand of cards you describe or no," responded the Professor, severely, "I must continue to insist on your reasons for aiming at Socrates and me."

"Which I didn't really aim at you none, Professor," said Jeff, making an effort to curb his exuberance. "If I had, d'ye see, I'd nacherally emptied you out o' that saddle a whole lot. No, I takes you for one of the Red Bull's Mexicans, an' was merely givin' notice that it wasn't my day to receive. Bein' it's you, however, of course that's different. An' I tells you ag'in, Professor, I'm plumb glad to see you. Come up to camp."

Jeff had no trouble in convincing the Professor of his friendly intentions.

"Only an instance of mistaken identity, then," said the Professor, pleasantly.

"Preecisely," agreed Jeff. "I shorely never knew my learned friend in that hat."

Jeff had pitched a big wall tent, at a little distance from the mouth of what he termed his mine. He didn't care for the tent, as he assured the Professor, but it gave him standing with his Mexicans.

"Which I does it," vouchsafed Jeff, "to mark a social sep'ration between me an' them greasers. To be shore I could draw the line with my gun, but I prefers the tent as less toomultuous."

At noon the cook dished up a wild gobbler, which the fatal Jeff had killed by moonlight on the Monk's Hill the night before.

"Plenty of pine nuts!" explained Jeff. "Thar'll be no end of turkeys this fall an' winter."

Jeff showed the Professor his tunnel, while the Mexicans took a nooning.

"It's Old Tom Moonlight's idee," said Jeff. "He says thar's treasure enough, in the bowels of that sand-hill, to make us all as rich as Creosote."

"Crœsus!" corrected the Professor. "Old Tom Moonlight is that young gentleman who returned Don Anton his knife, sending it through his shoulder?"

"He'd have stuck it through his neck," said Jeff, who felt as though the inaccuracy of his young chief called for defense, "only he was savin' the *rico* to play with."

"But the treasure?"

"You know as much as I do, Professor. As I saveys the layout, the treasure, whatever it is, lays buried in the hill proper. Now I've got to tunnel through this sand, followin', d'ye see, the little water course."

Jeff pointed to the thin, clear thread of water that trickled from the mouth of his tunnel.

"The diffukelty lies yere," resumed Jeff, with a great air of judgment. "Bein' she's wind-formed that-away, the sand in the hill's as fine as snuff, an' it keeps perkolatin' through the cracks of my timberin'. Four times, Professor, it's choked up on me. Some day it may all cave in, an' then I'll have to call for a new deck an' begin the game afresh."

Even as Jeff spoke, and as though his words were a signal, there came a soft, pouring, muffled roar. A cloud of sand as fine as flour arose and hung over the face of the hill like a cloud, hiding from view the

mouth of the tunnel. The pouring roar continued for the space of five minutes, during which Jeff pointed toward the yellow cloud with despairing finger.

"Thar!" he cried. "She's gone an' done it! The whole binged tunnel's filled up from r'ar to front, an' yere's Jeff Horne where he started!"

"Shall you give it up?" asked the Professor anxiously, for he sympathized with the angry despair of Jeff.

"Give up nothin'!" retorted Jeff viciously. "Which I'll find that treasure, you bet! if I has to pack this hill away in my hat!"

## CHAPTER XIX

### ETHEL THE UNMAIDENLY

THREE days after Robert was taken down Don Anton's courier to Pedro of the Knife returned. He came in, weary and heavy-eyed from long riding without sleep. He had delivered Don Anton's message to Pedro of the Knife; that reliable assassin with his Kiowas would be on hand.

"Pedro of the Knife," said the courier, "sends word that he and his Kiowas will be only a day behind me. They will come with sharp knives and full cartridge belts, and their faces will be colored for war."

"That is well," responded Don Anton. "You have reported to me, Juan; see now that you do not make a second report to somebody else. Too many reports are bad—for the messenger"; and the young *rico* gave a warning scowl.

"Don Anton need have no fears," returned Juan. "I have now no memory of what word Pedro of the Knife sent back. I recall nothing; neither why I went nor why I returned."

"That is as it should be, Juan. A short memory lengthens life, the padres say. Here is money for your hard riding."

Don Anton clinked down a handful of silver into

Juan's expectant claw. It had the effect of wiping away much of the weariness from that faithful individual's face.

"With a little luck from the saints," quoth Don Anton, "you may now play a week at monte before you are again poor."

Robert's illness did not disable Don Anton's plans. He resolved to send Pedro of the Knife upon his Dove's Nest mission of murder, without reference to Robert.

"I have the papers," reflected Don Anton. "What more should I require that this Robert could furnish? Also, I shall be careful to have Pedro of the Knife remember that he goes for this gringo, Robert, and not for me. His being ill will be all the better. Besides, he could do nothing if he were well. He has no courage, no force. His heart would fail him; he would only be in the way."

Pedro of the Knife was as good as his message. The evening following the day that witnessed the arrival of Juan, Pedro of the Knife rode into the Cross-8. He came alone, and to the two or three Mexicans with whom he passed a word, he said that he had been to Tascosa. Not one hint did he breathe concerning those Rabbit Ear Kiowas who, a mile to the west, splashed across the Canadian in his company that very afternoon. He reserved those tidings for Don Anton.

"Where are they?" asked the young *rico*, when Pedro of the Knife had told him how all things were in readiness for the red work he contemplated.

"I left them camped in Chico Cañon ten miles away. No one goes there; they will not be seen.

If they are, they will say they have come to hunt the buffalo."

Don Anton considered.

"How far are they from the Dove's Nest?" he asked.

"Four hours."

"Here, then, are the papers," and Don Anton gave Pedro of the Knife the documents which Robert had brought up from Austin. "Give heed to their safety, for they must not be lost. By these papers this Moonlight is a robber, and has stolen the Dove's Nest. It is now for you to take it from him. He will fight; but you and your Kiowas must not mind that. Remember, he has wronged me!"

"Also I shall not forget," replied Pedro of the Knife, "that I myself have but one ear. But you speak only of my Kiowas. Are none of our people from the Concha to go?"

"None! I have reflected and it is better that they do not. Besides, you will deal with but two men: this Moonlight and the one whom he calls 'Red River.'"

"But that Horne?—who is a fiend to fight!"

"He is digging in the sand-hill that lies against that second point of rocks to the east. I do not know why he digs; but when I heard, I did not let the Cross-8 people disturb him. He is less in our way where he is. When you have finished at the Dove's Nest, you shall send your Kiowas to ask why he digs. A Kiowa does not object to a scalp because it is streaked with gray hairs."

Pedro of the Knife licked his lips. The prospective taking off of Jeff appealed to his sense of humor.

"He will be so amazed," said Pedro of the Knife, "to be shot down in that prairie-dog burrow he is digging."

Don Anton fell to thinking.

"About the Dove's Nest," said he: "Your best time should be at daybreak. No, not to-morrow; the morning of the day after. It should be a surprise, you understand?"

Pedro of the Knife replied that he thoroughly understood. He seemed hurt at the intimation that, by any stress of noonday gallantry, he might be found so weakly brave as to give the hated Moonlight notice of his coming.

"No; we shall knock them on their heads as they lie snoring," he said.

"I think," remarked Don Anton, "that I'll ride over to your Kiowas to-morrow night. This Moonlight deserves the fire, and I should like to see that."

"They shall take him alive!" cried Pedro of the Knife, in ecstasy at the notion. "They step like cats, my Kiowas; they may easily make him captive. Then it shall be the fire, as you say. That should much rejoice my Kiowas, for most of them are young, and never saw a man burned at the stake."

"I shall come," observed Don Anton, who appeared to relish the thought of Moonlight among the crackling fagots.

"If we attack at daybreak—and my Kiowas, as you know, will not fight in the night—we shall start for the Dove's Nest an hour after midnight."

"If I should not appear," said Don Anton, as Pedro of the Knife mounted his pony for the Kiowa camp, "do not wait for me."

"I understand," returned the other as he spurred away.

Robert's illness reached its climax, and he safely passed what Aunt Tilda regarded as the danger point.

"Now," she thought, "care and good nursing should bring my boy around."

Aunt Tilda felt as though a stone had been rolled from her heart.

It was the day after the conference between Don Anton and Pedro of the Knife. Aunt Tilda, worn with her almost ceaseless vigils, and reassured as to Robert's condition, withdrew from the sick-room to steal a little sleep. She left an old Mexican crone, Juanita, to look after the wants of Robert. The invalid was in a fitful slumber, full of starts and wakenings; but there would at the worst be nothing required beyond pouring an occasional cup of water, and old Juanita could attend to that.

Don Anton, with Aunt Tilda gone, thought it a fair time to have a talk with Robert.

"You may go," said Don Anton to Juanita, as he entered the sick-room.

Juanita was slow in starting, not being settled in her own aged mind as to whether she should go or no.

"*Vamos!*" cried Don Anton, with such a ferocious emphasis that it sent old Juanita whirling through the door, and into the *patio*, as though she had received a shove.

That "*Vamos!*" not only expelled old Juanita, but it aroused Robert. His hollow eyes opened wide at sight of Don Anton.

"It is nothing," said the young *rico*. "I came

to tell you that all is arranged, and our vengeance sure."

Don Anton related in detail his instructions to Pedro of the Knife.

"They will burn this gray-eyed rascal!" cried he. "It is a pity that you are not able to go with us; it will be a revenge worth having and seeing."

Robert was thin to emaciation, and very weak. The tidings of Don Anton, however, aroused him deeply, and even brought a shade of color into his sallow face.

Don Anton saw this, for the sick-room was well lighted with its two open windows, it being in the middle of the day and broad sunlight.

It was by no means certain that Robert's wan cheek had flushed with joy. Don Anton himself regarded the color that his news had summoned to Robert's face as an evidence of trepidation, for he muttered:

"It is as I thought. This sickness is for the good. He is already afraid, and if he were up, he would ruin our design."

Robert made no direct response to Don Anton, but remained silent. The prospect of that bloody programme, prepared for the coming daybreak at the Dove's Nest, had shaken him. His eyes, big and hollow with sickness, were seen to waver; they roved hither and yon in a troubled way. At last he asked:

"Is Professor Doremus here?"

Don Anton's black mustache twitched like the whiskers of a cat; a smile half parted his thin lips.

"He has business every day and all day long, your Professor Doremus, that carries him an hour's ride

away. He and this fellow of Moonlight's—the man Horne—are busy about a sand-hill. No, I don't know what they do; maybe they dig for treasures. However, it is good; it removes your inquisitive Professor at the time I wish him absent."

"And Captain Ruggles?"

Robert put the query in an alarmed whisper. His weak anxiety to bring about a halt in those Kiowa arrangements was evident. It caused Don Anton to laugh outright—being so evident, and yet so futile! It was a condition calculated to amuse the young *rico*. The pain, mental or physical, of another was always pleasant to him; and he did not like Robert.

"The Red Bull," said Don Anton, "is also away. He started for the 'Dobe Walls this morning, and will be gone a fortnight. No, *Amigo*"—this soothingly—"you need have no alarms. Neither the Red Bull nor your busybody Professor can interrupt."

It was a joy to Don Anton thus to tantalize Robert. However, what he told of the Red Bull was true. That astute owner of the Cross-8 no sooner heard how Pedro of the Knife had returned than he remembered a deal of urgent business between himself and Merchant Wright. In case anything, upon which the fretful temper of a Panhandle public might thereafter found complaint, should come to pass within questioning distance of the Cross-8, the prudent Red Bull proposed an alibi.

With the Red Bull and Professor Doremus both absent Robert was helpless. He couldn't tell Aunt Tilda, couldn't tell Ethel. To do so would accomplish nothing. Bedfast, weak, cut off from counsel, Robert sank back on his pillow with a groan.

"I will go," said Don Anton, imitating sympathetic concern. "You are not strong enough to bear good tidings; and even joy can injure the sick. Think as little as possible. But if thoughts will come, why then cheer your heart by reflecting that nothing now can save that Moonlight. He will throw no more knives when the fire is done with him."

Don Anton left Robert frightened at what was afoot, and burning with fever. Outside in the *patio* he met old Juanita; her bleared eyes followed him as he walked away. When he was out of sight old Juanita did not return to Robert; she went straight to the Doña Inez.

Later, by an hour, Aunt Tilda came in to Robert. She found him, to her dismay, weaker and worse off than at any time since he had been taken ill. At this she could not blame herself too much.

Ethel, at the Cross-8, found herself much alone. The Doña Inez commonly was not available for social purposes until late in the afternoon. Not that the Doña Inez was busy over household affairs. The Cross-8 would have fared but dismally had the Doña Inez undertaken the direction of its domestic destinies; for our blooming señorita made a specialty of ignorance on matters of housewifely concern. Her brown little hands, the size and almost the color of October leaves, would have managed badly at anything more recondite than making chocolate or rolling cigarettes.

It was a radical difference in the habits of the two girls that led them to see so little of each other in the earlier hours. Ethel's inclinations taught her not alone to rise but almost to retire with the lark.

The Doña Inez on the other hand possessed certain cat-like characteristics that, with least encouragement, kept her awake and moving for the greater part of the night. Making up for these nocturnal activities, she was no one to turn out—if "turn out" be not too rude a phrase—with the sun. Moreover, after she did turn out, it was her languid pleasure to sit for long hours, wrapped in her *reboza* of black and yellow, sipping chocolate and blowing fragrant rings from her cigarette. She was no conversationist at such times, and would be dreamily silent unless directly addressed. In case she were spoken to, the Doña Inez purred assent to everything. Decidedly pleasant, she was decidedly passive until the day was well on its way to the west.

It was just after Don Anton paid Robert that disturbing visit. Ethel had ordered Cato to saddle Jet; she was in for a gallop, the weather being bright and crisp.

As she stood waiting, whipping her riding-skirt with the rawhide quirt, she was more than a trifle astonished to observe one of the Cross-8 retainers leading up *Muchachito*, the bay pony that was the particular pet of the Doña Inez. *Muchachito* was saddled and bridled and fully equipped. This made Ethel wonder. Could it be that the Doña Inez, defying precedent, contemplated a ride at that hour? She should now be but half through her chocolate, her cigarettes, and her wordless, feline musings!

The two ponies, Jet and *Muchachito*, were brought up together, for those orders to saddle had been issued about the same time. Ethel resolved to find the Doña

Inez. If she were for a canter, she should have Ethel's company.

Just as Ethel reached the door of the Doña Inez's room, that young lady came out. Like Ethel, she was arrayed for the saddle. Unlike Ethel, there was in her face a look of activity, and a daring energy suppressed and held in check.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Doña Inez at sight of Ethel, "this is better than I hoped. I sent Juanita for you. You are ready? Come!"

The Doña Inez brushed by, and the next moment was on *Muchachito*. Ethel was scarcely an instant behind with Jet. She could see that the Doña Inez was moved of no ordinary reason in what she was about; that, for the nonce, was enough. Once free of the Cross-8, Ethel made no doubt the explanation would be forthcoming.

The Doña Inez, taking the lead at a canter, headed *Muchachito* for the south. There was no trail, nothing save the grass under foot.

The two girls were a mile from the ranch, when Ethel spoke.

"What is it?" she asked.

It surprised Ethel to discover that her own nerves had become as tense as a strung bow. The excitement that had taken possession of the Doña Inez was contagious; and Ethel, while not knowing its origin, was beginning to feel it.

"Don't ask me now," returned the Doña Inez. "A little further, and you shall know."

The girls rode on. Now and then a shadowy jack-rabbit, startled from beneath a mesquite, fled away to one side, looking in its arrow-swift flight like a

brown streak drawn across the gray face of the dust-colored plain. An occasional coyote peered at them from a respectful distance, and tried to settle in its narrow wolf-wits whether or no this sortie of two maidens might mean a hunting, whereof the sequel would be a meal.

The ponies kept steadily to work for thirty minutes, the Doña Inez, with *Muchachito* keeping the advance. They were five miles from the Cross-8 when a broad trail was reached. The Doña Inez pulled short up, *Muchachito* breathing deeply, for the pace had been faster and the distance longer than he liked. Jet, who was more in form, had stood the journey better.

"You see the trail?" The Doña Inez pointed with her little hand. "It holds to the south through that cañon. You could travel for one hundred miles, and never lose it."

"What is this mystery?" asked Ethel. "You have not brought me here to show me this trail."

"I have brought you here," returned the Doña Inez, with a gravity and a vigor strange enough to Ethel, "that you might save a life that you love."

Ethel's heart beat quickly; her breathing became deep and long.

"See now!" cried the Doña Inez, lapsing into her manner of spiteful sarcasm, "my Don Anton is a fool! He is so great a fool that, having driven Juanita from the room so that she may not hear, he then goes shouting his affairs so loud that when, like a true woman, she sits down beneath the open window, she can hear nothing else. This is what you should know: Don Anton makes a plot with Robert—who is less of a man, with even less courage, than Don

Anton. They talked together not an hour back. To-morrow at break of day Pedro of the Knife, with a horde of Kiowas, will fall upon him whom you love —upon your Señor Moonlight! Would you save him? Good! That trail leads direct to his home on the Palo Duro—his Dove's Nest! It is a good name; for the dove is on her way."

Ethel understood the Doña Inez, and accepted every word without challenge, comment, question or doubt. The dread import of what she heard overmastered all else. She never thought of denying that charge of love, or asking how or when or where the Doña Inez became informed of the plot. She thought of but one thing. As though it were pictured before her in a mirror, there rose the peril that overshadowed her insolent gray-eyed one. Instead of weak, she grew strong to the occasion. Her splendid courage, like the courage of a thoroughbred horse, mounted in her veins and flamed in her face. Her eyes shone and glanced like diamonds.

The Doña Inez beheld the flaming cheek and brightening eye. She misunderstood those signals, and read in them the symptoms of a profound attack of modesty and maidenly reserve. At this her wrath kindled.

"This is no time," she cried, hotly rebuking that misplaced maidenly reserve and virginal modesty which she thought she had discovered—"this is no time for fine ladyisms! It is now that you must be a woman!"

"I shall go," said Ethel simply.

"And I should go with you," went on the Doña Inez, softening as she saw her error, "but there are

many reasons against it. One is that I'm Don Anton's betrothed wife."

"You will not marry him now!" exclaimed Ethel, with a thrill of horror—"marry him, a murderer! who sets his savage bravos to assassinate an innocent man!"

"Oh, yes, but I shall," returned the Doña Inez, with cynical sweetness. "Neither is your Señor Moonlight such a paragon of peace and innocence! I should not send you to warn him, only I love you. Besides, I do not favor creeping upon folk in their sleep, to drive knives through their hearts."

The Doña Inez spoke now in a manner more composed.

"You have plenty of time," she explained to Ethel. "Pedro of the Knife and his Kiowas will not attack until dawn. You should be at the Dove's Nest by dark. You have but to give your Señor Moonlight the word, and, my heart for it, he will know what to do!"

The Doña Inez explained that no one but Ethel could have been entrusted to carry a warning to the Dove's Nest.

"My father's people," she cried, "are all on the side of Don Anton. A hint to one of them, and instead of going to your Señor Moonlight, he would have sought Don Anton. As for the sick Robert, he is deep for this death plot. It was that which took him to Austin; he brought back papers to make the murder safe. The old gray man—the old Professor—was nowhere to be found when Juanita had told me of Don Anton and the sick Robert. No, *chiquita*, it is you who must save him!" The Doña

Inez pushed *Muchachito* up close, and leaning from the saddle abruptly kissed Ethel. "Ah! I envy you! To love one like him! To be granted the privilege of saving him! Ah, that were bliss! Yes, I envy you!"

With the last word, the Doña Inez wheeled *Muchachito* and was off like a bird for the Cross-8 before Ethel could collect herself. She dropped out of sight in a dry arroya, and Ethel was alone.

Ethel turned Jet to the south along that broad brown strip of trail—the trail to the Dove's Nest, where dwelt the insolent gray-eyed one! There was nothing of faltering, nothing of hesitation, nothing save a great resolution. She must save him! With this thought holding fast by her heart, what other considerations obtruded themselves were made petty by comparison.

Jet was strong and young and fleet, and good to carry the girlish weight of Ethel through springy, tireless hours. The Doña Inez had foretold her advent at the Dove's Nest for dusk. Ethel, learned in saddle-craft, slowed down the swinging lope of Jet to a gait that should last the distance.

As Jet swept southward, Ethel tried to analyze her own feelings. It set her to profound study that she felt elate, uplifted, happy. Why should she rejoice? Did she love this insolent gray-eyed one? She would have died before confessing it, even to herself! No, of course she did not love him! How should she?—a man unknown to her!—a man of not altogether unequivocal repute! And yet he must be saved! Here her heart spoke. But then that utterance was no more than the voice of a common human-

ity. Who would sit by while murderous savages surprised a fellow-creature in his sleep and slew him? Ethel gave Jet his head, and encouraged a rounder stride.

One thing that invited her wonder was that she had no apprehensions. Had not the Doña Inez said that once he were warned, the insolent gray-eyed one would know what to do? Ethel, too, was filled with a shoreless confidence in the powers of that insolent one. She had but to tell him! He would take instant and unfailing steps toward his own as well as her protection. She never once thought of Aunt Tilda; and that was a mark of selfishness. Neither did the question of how she herself was to be extricated from the trap—reputational and otherwise—into which she was so steadily riding, present itself; and that was a generous mark of a spirit and self-sacrifice greater than that selfishness.

What grew in strangeness, and kept presenting itself for Ethel's ever fresh amazement, was a sensation of tenderness and joy in what she was about. A soft glow swept over her—a glow that had no lawful place in what sensations belong merely with saving human life. Also, she felt herself blushing; and the blush deepened when she discovered that she didn't care.

The sun was an hour above the harsh western sky line, and the long, fleet shadows of Ethel and Jet danced far out to the left. It was roundly three hours since the Doña Inez had given her that farewell kiss, and wheeled off for the Cross-8.

The trail was crossing a rolling stretch of country, made up of gray grassy billows with shallow wide

valleys between. Jet was going easily, and never a sign of weariness or loss of spirit.

Suddenly, with a zipp! something like a yellow pencil of light flew by, and splintered on the flinty ground ahead. It was an Indian's arrow.

Ethel's heart seemed to stop beating; she was seized with a choking sense of terror! Instinctively she struck Jet with her quirt; the cut raised a welt on the black glossy shoulder. At this unusual attention Jet shot forward at racing speed.

Another arrow, and still another, zipped right and left, to go driving and splintering into the baked earth beyond. Ethel bent lower, and patted and soothed Jet to conciliate and make amends for that instinctive cut of the quirt.

She glanced backward along the trail. A shiver cold as snow passed over her; next she was caught up in a hot swirl of fear. Behind, not two hundred yards away, were two Indians, their quick little mustangs coming on at top bent. As the mustangs flew toward her, their riders' bows went twanging like harp-strings, while arrow after arrow streamed from each.

Even in her terror Ethel grasped the whole horrible nightmare of paint-streaked hideous faces, dancing war-bonnets, winged arrows that sang and hummed like bees, and little ponies, nostrils wide, rushing on like comets. Burning one moment, she froze the next; and yet, through it all, she kept her seat firmly, and encouraged Jet with pretty pleading words and pats of the little hand to do his best.

And all this in a handful of seconds!

*Behind, not two hundred yards away, were two Indians.*

Even in the grasp of awful fear—such is the power of a master thought—Ethel found herself exulting to think that the Indians had come up from the rear. She was not cut off from the Dove's Nest! If she escaped the arrows, and Jet's speed held up, she would yet find that gray-eyed insolent one! He would protect her! And now she fled toward him as some shallop, gale-driven, flies for the sheltering port beneath its lee.

Jet was racing like the wind, breathing even, muscles working like spring steel. The arrows no longer zipped, but were supplanted by blood-curdling yells. The effect on Jet was good; the yells served to stiffen his pace.

Ethel cast another glance rearward. A feeling of hope and high relief started up. Jet was widening the distance; those murderers, howling in their paint and feathers, were falling behind. Still, they clung to the chase doggedly and would not give it up.

The foremost jabbed his mustang with his knife. Stung with pain, the knife-tortured pony rushed out ahead of his fellow, and for a space raced even with the pace of Jet. The rider plied his knife, and kept the frenzied mustang to its spasm of speed. That couldn't last! When the mustang was exhausted, and the knife-point could no more rouse it, Jet would pull away.

On swept the chase; the foremost pursuer four hundred yards behind Ethel, the other two hundred yards further to the rear. Feeling that Jet was holding his own and a little better, and no more arrows humming, Ethel began to get back her confidence. Those first fears somewhat abated, she settled her-

self to nurse Jet through the nerve-wasting contest.

Then came disaster, sudden and swift! In a moment all was terror and fresh horror! As Jet recovered from a leap, a stone rolled under his off fore hoof. He went down on one knee; then caught himself like a flash. But there had been a strain! Some tendon had been injured! Ethel's blood again ran cold, as she felt Jet growing lame and slow beneath her.

The Indians saw the stumble, and were sharp to gauge its effects. They urged their own blown ponies to a final rally. On they came like tired meteors. The yells grew louder. The arrows again began to glance and zipp to left and right. The feathers on one shaft flicked Ethel's cheek. She could feel a whirl and a confusion. And yet, through the mists of it all—and that was the horror of it—she knew that Jet was going slower and still more slow, while the fiends behind were drawing closer.

Suddenly she was aware of a stinging smart, as though her shoulder had been touched with white-hot iron. A fearful thing of feathered terror seemed fastened in her flesh.

With a shriek Ethel turned her head. An arrow had pierced the muscle high up on her left arm. It had passed two-thirds through and held fast, the steel head, red with blood, down-drooping toward her hand. She got a horrified glimpse of the three feathers that had guided the wicked thing, jutting up above her shoulder.

Ethel felt herself sicken. Jet's lameness increased. It was as though he now blundered forward on three

legs, pace no faster than a stumbling walk. With that the arrows ceased while the yells increased. Her pursuers felt secure of their prey.

Ethel's eyes were swimming, her ears ringing; she could feel her senses giving way. She knew that the Indians were drawing nearer and ever nearer. Now they were closing down upon her with the rush of a storm. She was in the clutch of death. Her white lips tried to pray. Then, without pain or warning shock, she ceased to hear or see or feel. At one stroke everything was swallowed up in a vast, pitying blank.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE POISONED ARROW

LET us go back a pace. Moonlight came back from the 'Dobe Walls to the Dove's Nest by way of Jeff and the Monk's Hill. He found Jeff crowding his Mexicans to their sand-digging and tunnel-timbering like a true taskmaster. The work seemed to be progressing hopefully. Moonlight was cheered; he might yet finger those rubies of the dead Don Lopez, and the grasp of the desert upon his destinies would be broken.

"How are you making out?" he asked.

"Famous, Cap'n," returned the amateur engineer; "plumb famous!"

"You seem to be feeling good?"

"Shore! Keep busy, Cap'n, an' you'll keep happy! Flies don't bother a b'ilin' pot."

Moonlight gave Jeff a bag of silver money, being part of what was paid by Merchant Wright for those buffalo skins. The bag clinked musically. As Jeff tossed it and caught it in his hands, he sang exultantly:

"Nothin' but money
Is sweeter than honey!"

"That's to pay off your Mexicans," explained Moonlight. "Also, when Wright's wagons come up the trail on their way to the Dove's Nest, they'll roll

you out a cask of rum. Your Mexicans seem a faithful lot. Better let them have a mouthful now and then, to lighten their hearts."

That evening Jeff paid his retainers, and gave them each a pint of rum. They said that Jeff would yet be Governor of Texas. Then they sat up the entire night, and gambled at monte, singing meanwhile the serenades of old Spain until the coyotes came very close to listen.

Jeff also heard, but declined to be interested.

"Let 'em drink; let 'em sing; let 'em gamble," quoth Jeff. "The morals of them greasers is nothin' to me. In the mornin' they dig; or I'll fix up trouble for 'em in hunks."

When Moonlight arrived at the Dove's Nest he found that Red River Bill had baled up the hides and was ready for the coming of the teams. By evening next day the Wright outfits had arrived and departed, bringing the cartridges and receiving the hides; and thereafter, with Moonlight and Red River as its sole inhabitants, the Dove's Nest returned to the even tenor of its ways. The buffalo killing and skinning were resumed; again the hides accumulated on the curing grounds.

Two nights later Joe Gatling of the Frying Pan rode up.

"You see," he explained, addressing Moonlight, "I thought, when I give you Frosty's letter, I'd saved myself this trip; but it was written otherwise. This time it's Ned Hanrahan."

As Joe spoke he gave Moonlight a long envelope. Besides the letter which it contained, the latter could feel a stiff four-cornered piece of pasteboard.

"If I go on packin' the mails this-away," vouchsafed Joe, "Scotty 'll shore begin to kick." Then to Red River: "How about the food supply? I'm as lean as a lynx."

Red River swung a huge bake-kettle from the open fire. In it were simmering and frying a dozen huge buffalo steaks. These, bake-kettle and all, he placed before Joe, and supplemented them with a wooden bowl heaped high with saleratus biscuit of his best baking.

"Cut in!" said Red River, the sententious. "Thar's coffee in that pot by the fire."

Joe went to the rude shelves that did for a cupboard at the Dove's Nest. No one waits on you in the Panhandle, so Joe waited on himself. He returned equipped of a tin plate and cup, and sat himself firmly down before that steak-filled bake-kettle.

For a full half hour Joe spoke no word, but acted. At the end of that time he had reduced the buffalo steaks by one-third and made a visible impression on the heaped-up biscuit. Neither was there so much danger of the coffee boiling over as when he began.

"That's what I call a reestorative," said Joe, as he leaned back after his banquet and rolled a cigarette.

"Which your appetite shore don't seem to be losin' ground none," observed Red River cynically, reviewing the ravages wrought by Joe.

Moonlight opened Mr. Hanrahan's letter. It read:

DEAR CAPTAIN:

The picture I enclose I finds in the room lately ockepied by that pulmonary party you drug in outen the snow. In the jedgment of me an' Bob, it's the picture of you, took, say, when you was a yearlin'. Wherefore we sends it, per hand of Joe who's headin' this mornin' for his Fryin' Pan home. If the picture

ain't yours, why then it's simply a stack down wrong, an' no harm done. In sech case give it to the pulmonary party at your convenience an' much oblige

Yours truly,

NED HANRAHAN.

P. S. Said pulmonary party looked too dead to skin when he leaves with Scotty, an' I offered Bob two to one in bloos he wouldn't last till the spring round-ups. Bob refoosed to take it, an' swung an' rattled for four to one, which in the present state of my information I didn't feel jestified in givin'. If you cross up with this pulmonary party, an' notice any change for the worse, try an' get me word. I'd shore like to skin Bob outen a stack or two.

N. H.

Moonlight glanced at the photograph. He remembered well the day in Baltimore when it was struck off. It had been taken no more than a handful of months prior to that far-off night when he left old Somerset without saying "Good-by!" It brought up a multitude of memories—memories clothed with sadness.

Most, however, it brought up the question of how it came to be in the hands of his enemy. What should one, whom he had never met, whose very name was unknown to him, be doing with this photograph of himself?

"And yet," mused Moonlight, "the explanation will be simple enough, I'll wager, when it gets to me."

That Robert would seek possession of the Dove's Nest, Moonlight confidently expected. There would otherwise be no wit in that long journey to Austin. His own course, too, had been settled upon. Rifle and knife, he would hold the Dove's Nest against all comers.

When the blizzard overthrew his first plan, Moonlight made another. He would not now seek Robert; he would let his foe seek him. It would do just as

well to meet the latter at the Dove's Nest. Indeed, since killing was resolved upon, Moonlight preferred the Dove's Nest. It would then, as a transaction in red, be more quickly understood and accounted for by the Panhandle intelligence.

Certainly, this last was far and away an improvement on an earlier impulse, which had come to him after he left the 'Dobe Walls, urging him to find out Robert at the Bar-Z and compel him to a bloody understanding. The "Beautiful One" would be at the Bar-Z. Moonlight hesitated at carrying his war into her tender vicinity. Since it was the earliest instance of any such delicacy on his part he was struck with it as strange. He would not, with the thought of the "Beautiful One" before him, go to the Bar-Z. No, he would wait for Robert to come to the Dove's Nest. They might then try out their differences to a close.

Moonlight, having taken that individual's timid measure, argued that Robert would come backed with a force. He was certain that no Americans would be of it. Sure as to the feeling of the Panhandle, he knew that the enlistment of an American in Robert's interest would be out of the question. No such solecism was possible.

No; Robert would surround himself with a dingy bevy of Mexicans. Moonlight was shrewd enough to argue that in such a coil, wherein smoke would doubtless curl and rifles crack, Robert would have the help of the revengeful Don Anton. Also that he would not have the prudent Red Bull's.

"Not," he considered, "but what my friend who wants the Dove's Nest will have the Red Bull's best wishes. Those wishes, however, will be silently ex-

pressed, and at no time take the shape of lending him any help from the Cross-8. With Don Anton it is different. He would give him every Baca peon on the Concha. Don Anton will depopulate Chaparita, if it be necessary to make the campaign a success, stipulating only for my destruction." He spoke to Red River.

"We are going to have a fight," he observed carelessly.

"Greasers?"

"Don Anton's greasers."

"Yere?"

"Yes, at the Dove's Nest."

"Let her roll!" was the final comment of the acquiescent Red River, who fought as part of the day's work.

"They should be here inside of the month," Moonlight went on. "There may be as many as thirty."

"Thirty or three hundred!" responded Red River, "what's the odds? A greaser can't fight."

Red River had all of that contempt for a Mexican which the American ever entertains. When the enemy is Mexican it has been the Texas habit to ask, not "How many?" but "Where are they?" and Red River was of an unmixed Lone Star strain.

"They will try for a surprise," remarked Moonlight, running the probabilities over in his mind. "They should come in the night."

"Good!" returned the undisturbed Red River. "Night or day, we'll be yere."

Neither Moonlight nor Red River thought of sending for Jeff. Nothing so humiliating as asking reinforcements against a parcel of Mexicans would be

entertained by either. Not that Jeff was wholly overlooked. A remark of Red River showed as much.

"Jeff will be fightin' mad," he said with a grin, as though the jest appealed to him, "when we pulls off this play, an' him left out."

That picture, and the letter from Mr. Hanrahan had come to disturb the reflections of Moonlight. And yet they did not reshape his plan of awaiting Robert at the Dove's Nest. Still it would relieve him to have the puzzle of it cleared up. In defending the Dove's Nest he would else feel like one shooting in the dark. He reasoned from that picture that his foe knew more of him than he knew of the foe; and while —when it came to lead and steel—he could perceive in that no advantage to the enemy, it was an ignorance on his part which he preferred to have removed.

That photograph was more upon Moonlight's cogitations than his pride would have cared to admit. At last a conclusion was reached. He himself would visit the Bar-Z, not for conflict but for information. He would show the photograph, and ask Robert to explain. The explanation might mean war or peace; he would be ready for either. Meanwhile, a sly hope set his pulse to a faster pace that his call at the Bar-Z might result in a glimpse of the "Beautiful One"—whose handkerchief was even then about his throat! He might learn her name, and settle the meaning of that embroidered "E." These latter meditations were gently pleasant.

It was a few evenings later. Moonlight and Red River were over their final buffalo steaks.

"To-morrow," spoke up Moonlight, "when I've killed for the day, I think I'll ride over and take a

look in on Jeff. I shall be gone four days. You'll find plenty to do with what robes are on hand."

Moonlight said no word as to what should be the course of Red River in case Robert and his Mexicans descended on the Dove's Nest during his absence. Such a contingency might happen; but if it did, Red River could be relied upon.

With the first slant rays of the eastern sun Moonlight was in the saddle. President quickly put behind him the huddle of miles which lay between the Dove's Nest and the killing grounds. The work would not be hard that morning.

As Moonlight came within sight of the usual bedground of the buffaloes, his eyes were gratified by the spectacle of a shaggy herd of bulls lying or grazing on the gentle slope. The frost on their rough shoulders glittered like jewels in the early rays of the sun.

When about a mile from the bulls, being carefully down the wind from their easily excited nostrils, Moonlight dismounted, and putting President between himself and the quarry used that sagacious animal as a stalking horse. The bulls were not afraid of President wearing an empty saddle. With Moonlight on his back, they would have shambled off.

Making two hundred yard tacks, Moonlight seesawed President from left to right, like a vessel beating up against the wind, he himself keeping ever on the blind side from the bulls. In this zigzag fashion he approached within shooting distance of the heavy brutes. At this they began to turn restless, and one or two walked a threatening step toward President, tossing their horns, being disposed to bully. Why should this foolish and unmannerly horse be per-

mitted to disturb their repose? The thought raised their dander strangely, and they paused to paw the sod and cover their shoulders with warlike dust, thrown up by indignant hoofs.

Moonlight took the range with his eye, and notched up his rear sight—a buckhorn—to meet it. Then he fell on one knee, just under the nose of President. For that one shot he would need a cover. Afterward he could throw off concealment; the work would be certain and never a chance of failure.

He brought the heavy Sharp's to his shoulder. The fresh morning breeze blew squarely in his face. He picked out a dignified patriarch, that stood up the wind from the herd, and aimed at a place back of the fore-shoulder.

"Bang!"

The big Sharp's roared; the puff of smoke went drifting down the wind. Shot through the lungs, with fore feet planted wide, nostrils gushing blood, the wounded bull stood fighting for breath. A moment passed. He crippled slowly forward, stumbled, pitched heavily upon his shoulder, and then rolled over on his side. Moonlight flicked out the empty shell and snapped in a fresh cartridge.

With the roar of the big gun the buffaloes started to fly, stampede at their hearts and heels. Instantly their mood changed. The scent of the streaming blood from the stricken one swept down upon them with the breeze, and changed fear to madness. They forgot to fly, became blind to danger, thought only in their frenzy of destroying their wounded mate. They charged upon him with lowered horns and hoarse insane bellowings. The wounded buffalo had fallen be-

fore the nearest bull reached him. That made no change. They gored and trampled the recumbent form. Dying or dead, it mattered not to those uncurried lunatics, whose reason had been overthrown by the smell of blood.

"Bang!" spoke the buffalo gun.

And now a second bull stands tottering and bleeding out his life. With a rush his crazed comrades are upon him.

"Bang!"

More blood, and the shaggy mob attack the third. It is like a battle. The bulls fight blindly, madly, feeling nothing save that senseless blood-rage. And all the time the big buffalo gun is booming, sending on its leaden messengers of slaughter.

The riot proceeds for fifteen minutes. Moonlight counts thirty victims, some quiet in death, some feebly struggling, stretched upon the slope. It is enough; he remounts the unconcerned President, who has been nibbling grass throughout the carnage, buffaloes and their destinies being nothing to him.

At sight of Moonlight on President the bulls became instantly sobered. They left off their lunatic bellowing and the goring of dead friends, and took to flight lumberingly. Moonlight paid no heed to them. At that their scare wore off, and after running a half-mile they slowed down, and began grazing as calmly as though no such death-trinket as a Sharp's rifle had as yet found invention.

Moonlight rode across the intervening four hundred yards, and contemplated his work. Had one fenced in the thirty dead buffaloes as they lay, one wouldn't have enclosed an acre of land. He raised his eyes in

the direction of the Dove's Nest. In the distance, turning a rise of ground, he made out Red River with team and wagon on his way to the skinning.

"And now," thought Moonlight, "for my friend of the Bar-Z! With this photograph over which to begin a conversation, and with our six-shooters to punctuate it, we ought to know more or know less of one another before we part."

Moonlight, without waiting for Red River to come up, struck across country as the crow flies for the Monk's Hill. He would stay one night with Jeff, and be off for the Bar-Z in the morning.

The pace of President would not have been called headlong, and yet the steady stride ate up the miles like a vulture. They seemed to melt beneath the flying hoofs, as snow melts in the hot face of the sun.

"At this gait," thought Moonlight, "there should be plenty of daylight left when I make Jeff's camp."

Two hours went by. Suddenly he pulled up with an ejaculation of disgust. He put his hand to his pocket, and then brought it away baffled. The thought had come to him that the photograph was left behind; the moment's search confirmed it.

"There's wisdom!" exclaimed Moonlight, in mighty dudgeon with himself. "It's like the act of a boy! The worst is that President will be punished most; it means extra miles and extra hours for him."

Around came the velvet muzzle of President; again he was urged to that long, unbuckled distance-devouring gallop. Only now he was pointing for the Dove's Nest, and not for the Monk's Hill.

Moonlight was in no good humor with himself. Not being clairvoyant, he failed to foresee how important

for his heart and his hopes the disaster of that forgotten photograph would prove. One should not condemn a cause until the result is known. Being human, however, and wholly unwedded to the above philosophy, Moonlight berated himself as though he were the worst of felons.

Red River was still absent at the buffalo skinning, and Moonlight had the Dove's Nest to himself. He took advantage of his return to make a coarse repast on coffee, biscuit and cold boiled buffalo tongue. Pending a fresh start, he unloosened the double cinches of his saddle. President, at this relief, breathed deeply, and then, emulating the example of his master, set about refreshing himself on the short grass.

Moonlight now was in no hurry; he had lost the morning, he would not try to save the afternoon. President, on a pinch, was capable of putting one hundred miles between feed and feed; but there abode no present occasion for such heart-breaking haste, and the day was well along before Moonlight made a fresh start.

"If it hadn't been," said he, as he swung into the saddle, "for this foolish lapse of memory, I'd be at Jeff's camp by this time."

Again he struck out, adopting now that open trail which ran away to the north. Ten miles out from the Cross-8 he would break to the right for the Monk's Hill.

The sun was swinging low in the west, and President had entered a narrowish part of that same cañon which had aforetime beheld the discomfiture of Pedro of the Knife. Moonlight was thinking on that earless one, and his thoughts made for his disparagement.

"It doesn't speak well," he was saying to himself, "for the Mexican's reputation as a fighting man, that he has not come for his revenge. Surely, if the loss of an ear won't rouse him, he must be exceeding tame."

Moonlight was turning in his mind the tameness of Pedro of the Knife, to the steady lowering of that assassin in his good esteem, when he was brought up short by a ringing volley of yells. In a moment he was out of the saddle, and making for a huge bowlder that topped the cañon's side. Once there he might see without being seen.

It cost but the splinter of a moment, and he was behind the bowlder. From this vantage point he commanded the trail for the distance of a furlong. Then it dipped out of sight into the low ground beyond.

It was from this low stretch came the cries. They grew louder as their source drew nearer. As yet the authors of those yells were hidden by the lay of the ground.

Moonlight recognized those shouts as readily as a sophomore recognizes his college cry.

"Kiowas!" he ruminated. "They are chasing some one! If he'll only last until he is over yonder crest, I may do something to his advantage."

The yells, throughout which ran a note of savage triumph, waxed in volume as the chase came on.

"Kluck! kluck!" said the Sharp's.

The sound was oily and full of unctuous anticipation, as though the rifle were licking its lips. Perhaps it was; since rifles feed on slaughter, surely they should be pleased with slaughter.

Moonlight's gaze was fastened on the bare, gray, grassless spot where the well-worn trail broke over the hill. What he expected was a Mexican herder flying, hand and heel, from a party of Kiowas, who had left off buffalo hunting for the more engaging pastime of hunting the Mexican.

"Yes," he went on, as though apologizing to himself for some meditated piece of misconduct, "I think I'll stop them. Not on the Mexican's account, of course; for as between Kiowas and greasers, I've little or no choice. But I don't care to encourage the coming of Kiowas to the south side of the Canadian. Their range lies to the north; over here they'd get in my way and spoil my hunting."

These reasons appeared convincing and satisfactory, and Moonlight crouched—rifle to the fore—as sharply set as a rattlesnake coiled to strike.

"Suppose now it turns out to be my friend Pedro of the Knife."

The notion caused a puckering about the corners of Moonlight's mouth. It was out of place, however, and wondrously at variance with what transpired. Even as he entertained the fancy a foam-flaked pony, lame and stumbling, came halting over the crest to stagger forward a pace or two, and stop. The rider, a girl, pale and senseless, slipped from the saddle as a snow wreath slips from a hillside. There on the grass she lay, dead or fainting, while the spent, foam-dabbled pony stood with drooping head and quivering flank.

Moonlight, the immovable, could not restrain a cry.

"The Beautiful One!" he exclaimed.

The next moment, eye agate, jaw iron, he became as steady as a tree.

There was no long wait; events crowded hard upon events. Coincident with the appearance of Ethel a painted savage showed his ocher-streaked features above the ridge. His beaten pony, worse shaken even than Jet, fell on its knees as with a last effort it scrambled onto the level ground. The yelling rider never paused. Knife in hand, he was instantly off the pony, bending over Ethel.

That marked his end. Like a flash he was covered by a muzzle that never erred. The great Sharp's boomed and a bullet—eight to the pound—went crashing through his brain. Throwing up his hands, the painted one died without a cry, his knife tinkling on the hard ground. As he went down Moonlight ran forward like a deer, slipping in another cartridge as he sped.

Kiowa number two, if he heard the report of the buffalo gun, failed to understand. Perhaps he lost all notice of it, drowning its reverberations in his own yelling uproar.

Moonlight ran to the crest of the hill, holding it a first duty to consider that yell-maker, not yet in view. There he was, fifty yards below, pony at a walk. He had thrown himself from its back, thinking to make better speed on foot, and was pressing up the slope.

"Dog of a Kiowa," cried Moonlight, "look up!"

The astonished savage lifted his face. As he did so, the bullet planted itself between his eyes. Over he rolled, to perish like his fellow without moan or quiver, dead before he struck the ground.

Moonlight was by Ethel's side almost before the Kiowa had fallen. Her cheek was as pale as a lily. He gently seized the arrow, intending to break off the head and draw the Osage-orange shaft from the shoulder. The arrow-head—steel and of a rusty brown—was loose, and came off in his fingers. The loose arrow-head caused him to start with a kind of dismay.

"What!" he cried. "A war arrow! Now heaven forbid it be poisoned!"

From the gray eyes there looked out a great alarm. Quick as thought he drew his knife, and with swift deftness ripped wide the dress sleeve from wrist to throat. The wound itself was slight; the arrow had pierced no more flesh than might have been taken between thumb and finger. He removed the headless shaft, and wiped away the oozing blood which showed like crimson on ivory against the snow-white skin. The steel had made a double wound, the cuts no more than a half-inch apart.

Ethel's face was the hue of marble. Moonlight wasted no precious time. Speculation as to whether or no the arrow had been dipped in poison would be fruitless, and could decide nothing. Also, he was too well versed in Kiowa methods touching war arrows to accept the chance. There was no hesitation, no diffidence. The moment he drew out the shaft, he laid his lips to the wounds. If there were poison he would draw it forth. It was the best remedy; under the circumstances it was the only remedy.

Whether it were the unusual treatment, or just her young, strong life returning of itself, is hard to say. After a moment, however, Ethel's eyes opened and

stared skyward in a dimmed way. Her wits were still abroad; the past as well as the present was in a mist. Then of a sudden her glance fell on Moonlight. Instantly she seemed to know and understand; at that, face and neck and milk-white wounded shoulder went from snow to rose-red.

## CHAPTER XXI

### APPLIED SCIENCE AND THE MONK'S HILL

For full fifteen lurid minutes, following the disaster at the Monk's Hill, Jeff expressed himself concerning what he called his "luck." He was a finished rhetorician of the Panhandle variety, and good judges, such as Mr. Hanrahan and Merchant Wright, would have said that he did the situation justice. In the end, Jeff ran down and turned to the Professor, who was standing by full of sympathy and science.

"What do you-all think yourse'f, Professor?" asked Jeff.

"Friend Jeff," the Professor returned, "I will not pretend that the rougher outlines of a plan have not occurred to me. Let me revolve this matter in my mind, and I may have a suggestion to make."

The Professor walked away toward the river, leaving Jeff surrounded by his Mexicans, contemplating the sand-choked mouth of the tunnel. The Mexicans crossed themselves resignedly after the manner of their church, as showing that in their estimation all was lost.

Jeff set them with shovel and wheelbarrow to clearing out the invading sand. It was a hopeless labor; the sand poured in as fast as it was cleared away. Evidently Jeff's timbering had been more or less disturbed, for every crack leaked a sandy stream. Jeff, however, held his retainers to their task. Until he

had formulated some fresh programme he might better keep them engaged; and, although they knew their work to be useless, the docile Mexicans made no remonstrance. They were used to act without consideration and upon suggestion of the superior mind.

The Professor as he strolled away had one thoughtful eye upon the giant sand-hill. At times he paused, and cast a sagacious glance toward the Monk's Hill proper. After several minutes of rumination, he came back to Jeff.

"As you've already told me, Friend Jeff," observed the Professor, "this hill was formed by the winds."

"Shore!" returned Jeff. "Such breeze-built eminences is plumb common. Which I wish they'd been compiled some other way. Now if this yere was what a gent might call a nacheral born hill, the tunnelin' tharof would be a cinch."

"Yes," continued the Professor, not heeding Jeff, "it was formed by the winds. They were from the north or northwest, and came driving down the river bottoms, picking up their freight of sand on the way. Striking the wooded crest, they sifted down their freight of sand on the same principle that underlies the formation of snowdrifts."

"That's c'rrect," coincided Jeff, breaking in on the Professor's exposition, which had been delivered to himself rather than Jeff, and was in the nature of a scientific soliloquy; "it's as you lays it down. Them sand-freighted winds comes cavortin' down the river from the northwest. Which I might add that the wind puts in most of its time along the Canadian blowin' from the north and northwest."

"Precisely," interrupted the Professor. "And

since this sand-hill is wind-formed, doesn't it occur to you that it might be as readily removed by the wind?"

"Why, yes, Professor," assented Jeff, "it might, if only a gale would set in from the right direction, say from the south or southeast."

"It wouldn't have to come from so opposite a quarter. Here, I have an idea! How much canvas have you, canvas such as that of which your tent is constructed?"

"The tent's about all," replied Jeff, looking puzzled, but expectant. Then he added: "However, if it's canvas you want, the Red Bull ought to have bolt on bolt of the best 16-ounce duck in the Cross-8 store."

The Professor brightened up.

"Peradventure he has," he said. "This then would be my suggestion: let us erect a canvas fence or screen, carrying it out beyond the toe of the hill toward the river. It will then catch the breeze, and deflect it against the sand-hill. Also, if your Mexicans would but clear away the small trees and shrubs from the crest just above, it should doubtless assist in the experiment."

Jeff did not instantly comprehend. At last, however, the scientific Professor succeeded in making himself plain. Once he grasped the matter, Jeff gave it his heartiest adoption; for he was a radical, and went easily to new things.

The Professor marked a rough line from a point where the breeze-constructed sand-hill joined with the rocky Monk's Hill proper, on the side nearest the river. The line marked was twenty rods long, and the river end overlapped the point of rocks in which the Monk's Hill terminated by sixty feet. Along this

line he would build a canvas fence, assuming that so much canvas could be found in the ranch store at the Cross-8. On this latter point Jeff was confident.

"Thar's plenty of canvas at the Red Bull's," said Jeff. "You can put a bet on it!"

The Professor observed that he would see to the matter of that Cross-8 canvas. If it wasn't to be had from the Red Bull's outfit, it might still be found somewhere else, Tascosa or the 'Dobe Walls perhaps. Meanwhile, a first step would be to set the Mexicans to cutting smallish trees, from among the many tapering pines and aspens growing on the thither slope of the Monk's Hill. These must be trimmed of their boughs, and shaped into twenty-foot fence posts, to form a framework for the canvas.

"If there's duck sufficient," observed the Professor, "we should make it twenty feet high. It will control the breeze just as a conduit does water, and throw it against the base of the hill. If my experiment works faithfully out, the effect will be to cut a path between the sand-hill and the hill of rocks against which it rests."

"The same bein'," added Jeff, "calc'lated, in the nacher of things, to unkiver said spring which I've been tryin' to track to its lair by means of that tunnel. Professor, you're a wonder! Shake!" Here Jeff possessed himself of the hand of his scientific ally. "Which I've allers held you to be a eddicated gent; but never to sech extremes as now."

The Professor modestly repressed Jeff's enthusiasm. He advised that congratulations be withheld until triumph had been achieved.

The Professor elaborated his plan in detail. With

Jeff, he walked over the line of the proposed canvas wind-break, and drove pegs where the posts were to be set. Then the pair climbed the Monk's Hill, and marked two score and more of slim young trees for the axes of the Mexicans. They would need not only the posts, but a tree equally as large must be felled to serve as brace for each post. At this tree-marking the pair were busy until the sun had traveled half way down the western sky.

The Professor took his leave, promising to go into the subject of duck the moment he reached the Cross-8. When he had departed, Jeff withdrew his patient retainers from their dust-shoveling, and set them, axe in hand, to felling the trees. Green pine chops easily, and the post-cutting was not so hard as the sand-shoveling. As the Professor mounted Socrates for his return journey, he could hear the cheerful "chip-chop" of the keen-bitted axes, busy in the business of his fence posts. Also he was gratified, as he rode away, to feel on his right cheek a steady wind from the northwest.

"Only," considered the Professor, "the breeze will have to show a greater velocity than this. Now a wind traveling say forty miles an hour, properly deflected, ought to gnaw through such a snuff-like obstruction as that sand-hill in a very brief space. However, we shall see."

As Jeff declared, the Professor found the Red Bull's ranch store rich in bolts of canvas. He was in favor of taking them all.

The Red Bull, personally, was already on his way to the 'Dobe Walls in quest of that alibi for which he yearned, but the old Mexican major domo acted po-

litely in his stead. Certainly, the urbane major domo would give the honorable Don Doremus anything in his power! Also, pack mules—three would be enough —should be ready in the morning, to carry those bolts of duck wherever the honorable Don Doremus wished. The old, gray major domo beamed and shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands as he said these things. He was only too happy to be of use to the Red Bull's friend.

"He is locoed!" murmured the major domo, sorrowfully tapping his wrinkled forehead, as the Professor left the ranch store to hunt up Aunt Tilda, and ask concerning Robert.

"Locoed" is Mexican for crazy; but the old major domo was no less pleasantly ready to turn out the Red Bull's bolts of duck for all that. The honorable Don Doremus was undoubtedly insane; he was also, however, the friend of the Red Bull. Wherefore, sticking only to the latter consideration, the old major domo was prepared next morning with that trio of promised mules, packed to the ears with bolts of canvas.

"Is it for a long journey?" the major domo asked. "If it is, I will send also a camp outfit with the packer, who is to drive the laden mules for the honorable Don Doremus."

The Professor explained that the journey would mean no more than a couple of hours. Mounted on Socrates, he himself would prod forward the laden mules, and the packer offered by the generous politeness of the major domo might be dispensed with.

"Then," acquiesced the major domo, "if the journey be only two hours, the honorable Don Doremus has

but to turn the three mules loose when he is done with them. They will return of themselves."

When the Professor reached the scene of his proposed operations, he found that the indefatigable Jeff, with two of the Mexicans, was already setting up the tall posts for the canvas fence. So fast did the enterprise go forward, with two Mexicans chopping and two setting up and bracing the posts, that by sundown the close-set rank of poles was almost completed. Jeff squinted along them with approving eyes.

"Looks like a fine-tooth comb," he remarked.

The Professor, fertile in invention, had brought with him from the Cross-8 store divers packages of those small iron cleats wherewith wire fences are constructed. These were used to hold fast the stretched canvas to the posts. The work went on happily.

When the chopping Mexicans had cut what poles were needed, Jeff next set them to shoveling into the base of the sand-hill at its juncture with the Monk's Hill, where the canvas wind-break would end. This was to encourage the deflected breeze to take hold.

"An' it 'll shore take hold, you bet," said Jeff confidently, "once it gets started. An' you hear me, Professor! once one of them Canadian zephyrs sinks its teeth into that sand-hill, it 'll go through it like the grace of heaven through a camp meetin'. That's straight! Which it 'll unravel it like an old lady unravels a stocking. This yere sand-hill's goin' to be a thing of the past, said alteration bein' doo to occur with the first stiff gale that comes pirootin' down the creek."

It was the evening, and the canvas wind-break had been finished. Twenty feet high, and extending like

the wing of a fish-net almost to the river's edge, it looked from a distance not unlike the one side of an enormous circus tent. Being stiffly braced and secured, and the twenty-foot posts having been solidly planted, there was small chance of its coming down.

Jeff gazed upon the work complacently, and pronounced it good. The breeze was very slight, weather cold and clear. Even with the present slow pace of the wind, however, a little incessant demon-dance of snuff-colored dust was constantly going on at the end of the canvas chute. Jeff gave it as his opinion, and the Professor agreed, that much might be hoped from their unique device.

"This late in the year," said Jeff judgmatically, "of course sech a thing as snow or rain is likely. And yet I don't reckon now that neither of 'em or both would make much difference. The sand's bound to be dry underneath, d'ye see, an' that's where our wind-break gets action. No, sir," he went on confidently, as though replying to a question, "you hear my gentle voice! The fust time, wet or dry, the wind teches anything like a storm-gait, it 'll nacherally swipe said offensive protooberance plumb off the map. Once the topography of this yere region has been so far improved, our locatin' of Old Tom Moonlight's spring ought to be easy."

"I think as you do, friend Jeff," returned the Professor, rubbing his satisfied hands. "Yes, I really think we may congratulate ourselves. All we have to do now is wait for a wind of sufficient volume, confident of reaping from our arrangements a happiest possible result."

The Professor set out for the Cross-8. Robert's

condition was very low, and Aunt Tilda being correspondingly worried, the Professor thought it the part of friendship to be near at hand. He could do nothing; but his presence might comfort Aunt Tilda.

Jeff, pipe in mouth, was seated by his camp fire, enjoying his ease and dignity; for the weather was not severe, and one as hardy as Jeff might easily be comfortable out under the stars.

At a distance of twenty yards, about a fire of their own—for Jeff held that two fires were required to preserve a caste—the quintette of Mexicans sat jabbering exuberantly over a game of monte. Out on the dusky plains a staccato coyote was yelping in many keys at once, and the fluttering cascade of yelps sounded like a dozen coyotes.

Suddenly, as Jeff ruminated and puffed at his *Fruits and Flowers*, a dull muttering sound was heard, which merged finally into the "thump-thump!" of hoofs. A moment later the Professor mounted upon Socrates burst into the circle of light thrown abroad by the camp fire. The Professor wore an unusual look of anxiety which almost trenched upon alarm, while Socrates puffed and wheezed as though he had been put to a brisker pace than common.

"Friend Jeff," cried the Professor breathlessly, "I've hurried to you for advice."

"To me for advice!" repeated the astonished Jeff, letting fall his pipe. "Which I shore like that! An' you the best eddicated sharp that ever made a moccasin track along the Canadian, too! Howsumdever," he concluded, regaining his pipe, "proceed! One thing you can gamble the limit on, I'll give you the best in the shop."

The Professor in an agitated voice related how Ethel, about midday or a little later, left the Cross-8 with the Doña Inez, and had not returned. The Doña Inez explained, he said, that she had parted with Ethel several miles out to the south, leaving her to continue her afternoon ride alone.

"An' that is all the Red Bull's daughter could tell?" asked Jeff gravely, as though summing up. "How about Don Anton?"

"He wasn't at the Cross-8," returned the Professor. "They said that he rode away about an hour before sundown."

"Thar bein'," said Jeff, thoughtfully, "no one but them Cross-8 Mexicans about, of course you could learn nothin'. Did you send any of 'em out to make a round-up for the lost girl?"

The Professor explained that he tried to make up a party, and had failed. That was the feature of the case which caused him the most agitation. Not a Mexican of them all would throw saddle on pony.

"They looked frightened," said the Professor, his thin face paler than ever in the flickering light of the camp fire. "I asked the major domo to explain. He only shrugged his shoulders and said, 'In the morning they will go. Now they are afraid.'

"'Afraid of what?' I asked.

"'Of Kiowas.'

"That was all I could get from him," concluded the Professor, "and as a last resort I came to you."

"Of Kiowas!" repeated Jeff, who had been struck by the fears of the Mexicans, and the old major domo's elucidation of them. "Professor, them greasers must have seen something. This is their own country;

they're at home yere; and if they're frightened and say 'Kiowas,' it's a pony to a prairie dog thar's a passel of hostile Injuns hoverin' about. Oh, I don't mean," he went on, as he observed the heightened look of concern in the Professor's face, "that the little girl has been picked up by Injuns. Thar's more likely ways than that of accountin' for her not showin' up at the Cross-8. Her pony may have lamed himself by steppin' into a prairie-dog hole or by stickin' a cactus thorn in his hoof. Either way the little girl would be put afoot, an' it would then take her hours to find her way back to the Red Bull's." Then, getting to his feet with an air of resolution, "Professor, let's ride to the Cross-8, an' begin our hunt from thar."

It was only a matter of minutes when Jeff had his pony up and saddled. As they pushed along under the cottonwoods, the Professor deplored Socrates.

"When I reach the ranch I'll get a pony," said he. "Socrates is faithful, but sluggish."

"Stick to the mule, Professor," advised Jeff. "In a long pull, he'll go farther than any pony. To be shore, he ain't no jackrabbit for speed; but he's a laster, an' that's what counts."

There was a long silence, which the Professor broke fiercely:

"If the savages, whosoever they may be, touch but a hair of her head, I shall devote myself to their destruction! I shall hunt them day and night!"

"An' I'll go with you for that huntin', Professor," enjoined Jeff, who through the unfailing instinct of a man for a man had detected beneath the mild manner of his thin, gray friend the sterner elements of which he was composed. All silk and granite was the

good Professor; and Jeff, who had found it out, would have followed him through fire and flood. "Yes, sir," concluded Jeff, "count me in on the play. Likewise, when it comes to Kiowas or any other form of savage, I'm a heap more than what you'd call a neeophyte."

Jeff rolled the last word under his tongue like a sweet morsel, for he dearly loved long words.

The Professor, encouraged by Jeff, began to hope that Ethel might have found her way to the Cross-8 during his absence. If she hadn't, why, then, he and Jeff would ride southward on her tracks, as indicated by the Doña Inez, and seek some vital sign of her and Jet. He resolved, also, to say nothing of Ethel's absence to Aunt Tilda. As yet the latter had heard nothing, being employed with all her faculties over Robert, who was raving with delirium, spouting incoherencies about Don Anton, the Dove's Nest, Kiowas and Pedro of the Knife.

When the Professor and Jeff reached the Cross-8, they learned that no Ethel had returned. Not a whisper of tidings concerning her had floated in. Jeff declared for one word with the Doña Inez.

"Your Ethel was going south," said the Doña Inez coolly. "I am sure she will come back safe one day."

And that was all they received from the haughty heiress of the Red Bull.

It was creeping on toward midnight when the Professor and Jeff found themselves fairly started upon their search for Ethel. The night was dark, but the darkness offered no obstacle to so old a plainsman as Jeff. Taking the lead, the Professor close at his heels with Socrates, he held his course as straight as the flight of an arrow. Not until they reached the trail

that led to the Dove's Nest was word spoken; for Jeff had been deep in thought, and the Professor found himself borne down by fears that tied his tongue and stifled conversation.

It was Jeff who spoke.

"The moon will be up in an hour," he said. "That 'll give us a better light."

The Professor made no reply; his thoughts were sorrowfully running on the lost Ethel, and what Aunt Tilda's feelings must be when she discovered her absence in the morning.

"Did you notice," observed Jeff after a pause, "how the Red Bull's daughter wasn't in the least stampeded about the little girl not comin' home?"

"No," responded the poor Professor absently, "I was considering something else, I fear. I can't say that I gave much attention to her manner."

"All the same, she was as cool as a cucumber an' as steady as a church. What do you make of that?"

"I'm sure I can't tell," replied the Professor. "It could not have been heartlessness or cold indifference, for she loves Ethel dearly."

"Exactly! Then, since she was cool, an' it wasn't as you say from heartlessness, it must have been because she had no fears for the little girl's safety. Professor"—here Jeff became gravely emphatic—"that Doña Inez knows where your Ethel girl is, an' knows she's safe."

"I don't understand," rejoined the Professor, rousing up. "Explain yourself, friend Jeff."

"I wish I could," said Jeff; "but the diffukelty is that I'm as deep in the mud as you are in the mire. All I can say is that the Doña Inez, for all the talk of

Kiowas, wasn't skeered; an', Professor, I draws a heap of hope from that."

They were already upon the north and south trail, and jogging briskly along toward the Dove's Nest. The moon had cleared itself in the eastern heavens, and the rough landscape stood out bold and obvious in the silvery light. Jeff had not told the Professor his whole mind, and as he rode on the problem of Ethel's disappearance was being turned upon his busy wheel of thought with this result:

"That Doña Inez," ruminated Jeff, "allows she parts with the Ethel girl out miles from the Cross-8, an' that on partin' with her the Ethel girl continues to the south. If that statement means anything, it's this: Neither of 'em was ridin' for reelaxation; thar was something serious afoot. When the Doña Inez wheeled, it was to come back to the Cross-8; an' when the little Ethel girl keeps on to the south, it's shore she has some other destination in her eye. An' yet thar's nothin' to the south but the Dove's Nest." At this point Jeff balked a bit in his deductions. After a pause, however, his lucubrations took on a renewed and vigorous emphasis. "Yes, sir," he went on to himself, "that's it, simply because it can't be nothin' else. That Ethel girl was p'intin' out for the Dove's Nest. Shore, I can't say why; but I can see that sech is the fact jest the same. Bar Kiowas, it's bloo chips to white right now that we finds her with the Cap'n. I wonder what lays at the bottom of this yere romance. I s'pose I'll find out by sun-up; but as the game stands it's a heap too many for me."

Not being conventional, and having been reared to those broad social freedoms which flourish in the

southwest, Jeff beheld no daunting impropriety in the surmise that Ethel had gone upon a night gallop to the Dove's Nest. He thought it odd, for he could guess no purpose on her part. Also, he could not explain to his own satisfaction why she should leave the Cross-8 without word or sign of her intentions.

"Still, I reckon," he considered resignedly, "that after all it's only one of them things that women does, of which the reason is past findin' out."

"Professor," observed Jeff, at last waxing audible, "that Doña Inez saveys a mighty sight more about what's become of your little Ethel girl than she's told. For all that, you'll remember how she says the little one is safe; an' while as a roole I don't bank none on what any greaser, he or she, gives out, I inclines to believe the word of that Doña Inez person in this yere partic'lar instance."

## CHAPTER XXII

### IRONJACKET PAYS A PATERNAL VISIT

When Ethel raised her eyes to those of Moonlight, they had in them a timid look of appeal. It was as though she feared some hasty or adverse judgment, and would offer against it her gentle protest. Such a look was beyond the wisdom, as being beyond the experience, of Moonlight; had he truly read its meaning of half apology, it would have mystified him vastly. With nothing to instruct him, however, save his own rudely meager past, he beheld only a beautiful girl, wounded, and just taken by a miracle from between the very teeth of death. Also he felt guiltily abashed concerning the unamended freedom of that surgery.

This latter feeling was somewhat accentuated, when Ethel, as if by an instinct latent in her fingers, brought the slashed sleeve together, so as to hide again the wounded, naked shoulder, the red deepening meanwhile in her cheek and on her brow. As screening his own feeling of confusion Moonlight, for his side, resorted not only to words but actions. He whipped the handkerchief from his neck, the one upon which was that embroidered "E," and bound it with a tight neatness about Ethel's wounded arm. As he did so he said:

"It was I who cut your frock. I feared that the arrow might have been poisoned."

Moonlight spoke in steady level tones, as though arrow-pierced maidens were many in his life, and not to be particularly remarked. That outward calmness, however, was wholly of the surface; within, he burned like a volcano. The feel of that snow and velvet shoulder on his lips had been as a torch to tow. Dull and thick as he was to any emotion which should touch the heart, even he had begun to know that he would give his soul for one look of love from this girl. Loyal to his savage schooling, however, his face remained as expressionless as the face of a statue.

When Moonlight spoke of possible poison, he was quick to catch the terror that came struggling up through the red in Ethel's face, to whiten anew the rose-leaf lips. At this sinister sign, he made haste to modify his bluntness.

"To be sure," he said, "the chance of poison is so slight that it can't be measured. Indeed, it is not worth mentioning. Still, I thought it better to provide against it." Then, as drawing attention from a subject that even his untaught sensibilities recognized as delicate, he asked: "Can you stand? Is that scratch on the shoulder your only injury?"

Ethel, for all that healthful red, was far from being restored. What she had passed through had shaken her woefully. She could still hear the yells and see the painted demon-faces pursuing her. The memory was close and overpowering, and hung about her like a vision of horror. It was that even more than the words of Moonlight, which stole the color from her lips and pinched the corners of her pretty mouth. Over and beyond that mere feeling of passive horror, Ethel also remained mentally vague and weak. Moon-

light himself performed with a fortunate thoughtfulness in keeping between her and that dead, first Kiowa who, stiff and stark, glassy eyes staring up to the blue above, lay stretched not a dozen feet away. With nerves a-quake and her whole nature overstrung by that recent hideous peril, such a bloody spectacle of death would have meant collapse.

Moonlight repeated his question, holding out his hand as though to aid her.

"Can you stand?"

"I think I can," she replied.

The words came falteringly, but there was a sublime struggle to be brave. He gently lifted her to her feet. The effort was too much; her knees shook, the color again fled from her face. Her eyes swam; she seemed to grope for support with her hands; and next she would have fallen, had he not caught her up.

Moonlight held Ethel, fainting and limp, in the hollow of his arm, as a mother might a child, making little or nothing of her rounded one hundred and thirty pounds. At his whistle President trotted up. The sweet situation was a mighty enigma to the sagacity of President, as one might know from his sharpened ear and questioning eye.

In a moment Moonlight was in the saddle, his dear burden safe in the sure cradle of his arms.

"And now for the Dove's Nest!" he cried.

President appeared to understand, for with bridle reins loose upon his neck, he struck out gallantly toward the south. There was, too, an elastic freshness to his stride. It seemed to tell of a knowledge on his part of a present necessity for speed, if he cared to keep his standing with his master. He rolled up

the miles beneath him, as though he had been saddled for the first time that day.

When President broke south for the Dove's Nest, poor Jet, hobbling on three legs, entered a squeal of remonstrance against being left alone. Protest disregarded, Jet, the gregarious, looked about for the Indian ponies. Stiff and sore, they too were a mile away, making painfully for their own home camp, which lay beyond the western ridge. Like President, they had turned their unsympathetic tails on poor Jet. Being thus abandoned, the latter, gazing first at the flying President and then at the two Indian ponies, decided in favor of the former. Jet's pursuit, however, was but a poor and limping one; such a snail's crawl should bring him late to the Dove's Nest.

The Dove's Nest, in the ground-plan of its architecture, in no wise bore resemblance to the defensive Cross-8. The purpose of its construction had been trade with the Indians, and your fur traders had nothing to fear. The Indian has never been a commercialist, and what traffic he from time to time embarked upon was ever a failure and a fizzle; which militates against those theories advanced in certain learned quarters that he is a descendant of a lost Israel. And yet, unwise in barter as the Indian was, he knew enough not to molest his traders. These latter adventurous gentry were his one market. To them he disposed of his robes and furs; through them he received his lead and powder and rifles and calico and beads and iron arrow-heads, to say nothing of that awful pine-top whiskey which so warmed and satisfied the cockles of his aboriginal heart. For all of

which he became never so blindly blood-hungry as to bend arrow or lift war axe against the traders. And because of this safety, what ones tossed up the Dove's Nest, in its building had thought only of a store house and those few rude buildings called for by their comfort.

The main structure was a long 'dobe building put up Mexican fashion. It possessed two rooms, in one of which the traders had lived, while in the other they stored their goods. About the 'dobe house, and enclosing a quarter of an acre of ground, had been thrown a 'dobe fence, well toward six feet in height. In one corner of this huge yard or corral bubbled the spring from which the Dove's Nest drew its water supply. In the corner opposite stood a camp house, the latter edifice having but one room, and being of a later construction than the main building. One wide gateway in the north wall of the 'dobe fence was the sole opening to the outer world. For a quarter of a mile or more in all directions about the Dove's Nest the ground, except for a coverlet of harsh grass, lay bare and open. No one could come near the place without being seen, unless he called to his aid the cover of night.

This latter stratagem no Indian would resort to, since your Indian is so much the Parthian that it is against his religion to fight in the night. When the sun goes down begins the daytime of the ghosts; and your Indian, during the hours of night, lies close, so as to leave an uninterrupted earth for the spirits of his forefathers to roam upon. It is one of his points of theology.

Moonlight rode in through the open gateway of the

Dove's Nest, Ethel folded close in his arms. The long run and the double burden had told but slightly on the tireless President. Moonlight stepped gently from the saddle, carefully guarding the wounded shoulder against a pang.

Ethel throughout that sweeping journey had displayed no sign of life. Her eyes were closed; not a word had come from her lips. Only a returning color, and now and then a sigh, had been offered as a support to Moonlight's courage. These he had marked with gratitude, since otherwise he might have believed her dead.

"She is in a swoon," he thought, for in the poverty of his knowledge he supposed that a lady might faint indefinitely.

Descending from the saddle, with a firm conviction of Ethel's unconsciousness, it was as much a shock as a relief to Moonlight when she said:

"Put me down, please! I'm sure I can walk now."

The blushing truth was that the springy lope of President had not left the hobbling, squealing Jet a mile behind when Ethel's wits came back to her. At first but dimly, and only in partial fashion. She could feel herself borne along at a pace whereof, for all her many excursions upon Jet, she had hitherto no more than dreamed. The motion was easy, secure, like that of a rocking chair or a hammock. She experienced a trifling pain in the wounded shoulder; but her position was such, and she was held so fondly safe from jar or jolt, that it was in no wise aggravated; and indeed she hardly felt it.

Little by little the mists cleared from her memory. She recalled the dangers that had threatened, and her

sudden rescue from them. Then there rose up a picture of Moonlight, as he bound her wounded shoulder with that "E" embroidered handkerchief. It was at this crisis that Moonlight's hopes were uplifted by a reassuring scarlet breaking forth on brow and throat and cheek; for Ethel, in this new brightness of her intelligence, recalled the unique if charming surgery wherewith her arrow-pierced shoulder had been treated.

On recovering herself fully Ethel's natural impulse was to speak. There came to her, however, divers reasons against it. The swift motion, and the muffled drumming of President's hoofs, all but made talk impossible. Besides, being borne as she was like a child in the powerful arms of Moonlight, conversation would be embarrassing. Nor could the situation be mended; in his arms she must continue until they reached their destination. Such being the circumstance, silence and the semblance of insensibility offered a best refuge. Once she were released she might explain her gratitude and give that warning which had brought her so far from the conventional and the Cross-8, at one and the same time.

As Ethel mapped out this satisfactory programme, she lay with closed eyes, her head on the strong shoulder of him who had saved her from beneath the very paw of destruction. She could feel the measured beating of his heart. Also she realized, being a maiden well brought up, that the proprieties demanded she be more or less beset of a maidenly confusion; and she was not a trifle dismayed to discover that she experienced only a great, serene, heart-filling joy instead.

"Yes," repeated Ethel, as Moonlight did not at once reply, "I'm certain I can walk."

Moonlight released her, and to be sure she did stand on her own two little feet quite steadily. Fearing, however, that she might fall if she moved, the anxious Moonlight hung over her, ready to again seize her in his arms. This gave him the attitude of some tenderly solicitous hawk about to swoop.

"You're sure," he observed at last, "you're quite sure, Miss——"

"Pryce," said Ethel with much calmness. She had noted his hesitation, and deemed it the fitting time to put him in possession of her name. Also her instincts told her that, for all his iron steadiness, he was privily afraid of her, and that gave her the confidence of a conqueror. "Pryce," she continued, "Ethel Pryce."

Ethel! Then that embroidered "E" stood for Ethel! It was a beautiful name! Moonlight repeated it softly to himself:

"Ethel!"

It was in the first twilight fringes of the night, as the pair stood thus facing one another in the Dove's Nest corral. As though to relieve them from a situation that was not without its difficulties, Red River at this crisis threw open the door of the 'dobe house. Doubtless Red River was amazed at the unexpected return of Moonlight. Likewise the noble company he had brought home with him must have proved confusing. For all that, the imperturbable Red River showed no surprise; being, like Moonlight, too much a creature of his times and breeding to display astonishment, however grave the provocation. In fact, the words of Red River would have led up to a belief that he had

fully expected the coming of both Ethel and Moonlight.

"Howdy, folks," quoth Red River, coolly. "Grub's ready."

Then flourishing on high an empty bucket he struck across the corral to the spring.

Moonlight stepped forward as though to assist Ethel into the house, through the open door of which the fire sent a rosy flood of light. Ethel, however, forestalled his aid, and herself led the way.

Moonlight, once she was across the threshold, set himself to do the honors of the place. He gave her a seat near the fire, for the night was cool enough to warrant it. Then—for he still carried a possibility of poisoned arrows on his mind—he went about removing that handkerchief of the embroidered "E," with which he had bound the injured shoulder. Ethel's impulse was to object; but instantly she appreciated the spurious modesty of such objection, and submitted.

Red River came in, and stood watching. The little blood to flow, since the handkerchief was applied, had dried and made the silk stiff and harsh. Red River, at this, poured water into a basin, and was for soaking the handkerchief so that it might be removed without reopening the wounds.

Moonlight intercepted the excellent Red River just as he was about to apply the water. Sternly he waved him aside, and took the basin from him with an awful air of reproof. There was jealousy, ownership, reverence for the fair patient, all blended together in that air. Ethel observed it, and was fain to smile a little in a covert way. The smile deepened pleasantly,

when she saw how carefully he put that embroidered handkerchief in his pocket, once he had recovered it.

The wronged shoulder appeared swollen a trifle, but not much; and this latter was a hopeful indication. Upon Moonlight's recommendation, however, and to make assurance sure, the wound was again bound up in a mild application of crushed onions and salt.

"It will settle every question of poison, Miss—Miss Ethel," he explained, blundering a bit on the name.

Ethel gave way with grace; for she could see that Moonlight's concern was real.

Being repulsed from the surgery, Red River bent his energies to setting a table for supper. With so much good company, he was disposed, as he would have phrased it, "to go the limit," and proceeded to supplement the buffalo steaks, biscuits and coffee, which had formed his original supper-scheme, with preserves and tomatoes and sweet-corn and other delicacies which he took from certain tin cans. Continuing the good work, he spread the table with an alarming array of tin ware in the guise of plates and cups and basins, and enforced these with a profusion of knives, forks and spoons. Altogether Red River laid the foundations of a most recklessly gorgeous repast; for he meant that the entertainment should do credit to the Dove's Nest and its master.

While about these labors, Red River stole now and then a questioning glance at Ethel and Moonlight, whistling softly the meditative while, as one who is preyed upon by thoughts. Ethel, acting on those hints in costume offered aforetime by the example of the Doña Inez, wore a *reboza* about her head like a hood. Now she unfastened it and drew it over her

shoulders, which made her more beautiful than before. Red River had by this time spread his table with what he would have thought to be a feast for kings and emperors; but before Ethel would partake of it, she insisted on telling the purpose upon which she came.

"For you must know," said she to Moonlight, "that I was trying to reach the Dove's Nest when those savages"—here she shuddered—"discovered me."

"The Dove's Nest?"

Moonlight arched his brows inquiringly. Ethel went straight ahead, and related how the Kiowas, led by Pedro of the Knife, planned to attack him that very night.

"To-night?" repeated Moonlight, while Red River gave interested heed. "The attack then will occur as day is breaking." Red River nodded agreement to this. "Yes," continued Moonlight, "we must look for them with the first streaks of morning." Then, addressing Ethel: "You speak of Pedro of the Knife; has Don Anton Baca, or that young gentleman I met in front of the lodge of Ironjacket, no hand in this?"

Ethel had failed to mention Don Anton. In thus hiding his name she was thinking only on the Doña Inez. Robert she had not brought into her story for obvious reasons. Pedro of the Knife, and those Kiowas, were the only active forces, as she understood the design; wherefore she saw no necessity for going beyond their number. Both Don Anton and Robert might with safety to those most concerned be left out of the narrative, and this course would save perhaps some later heartaches. Now, when Moonlight put the query, Ethel became artful. She skipped all mention of Don Anton and went on to Robert.

"The gentleman to whom you refer," she said, "as being at the lodge of the Indian, is lying ill. He is not strong, and a recent exposure to a fearful snowstorm has brought him to the door of death."

"Ah!" exclaimed Moonlight. He could understand the last.

Ethel offered no particulars as to how she came by her information; she had brought them warning, that was all.

Nor did Moonlight press for details or sources. He had but to add that warning to what he was already aware of, to know the whole intrigue. He realized Robert's part therein, for all he was lying ill. Pedro of the Knife and the Kiowas, set on and perhaps accompanied by Don Anton, would make the attack; but it was Robert's work in Austin, and those papers he brought back, which were to furnish the basis of it. It must be admitted, however, that Moonlight concerned himself but little with these reflections, which hardly wandered beyond a heartfelt hope that Don Anton, in his own dandified person, might make one for the assault.

"I could then settle accounts with the scoundrel," thought Moonlight.

When she had told the object of her coming, Ethel stretched out her little hand to Moonlight, while her dark eyes shone softly.

"And now," she said, "I want to tell you my gratitude—my more than gratitude! You saved my life to-day."

"Gratitude!" cried Moonlight, half in wonder, half in tender rebuke. "Gratitude! And pray, let me ask, what do I not owe you for all you have dared and

suffered in our behalf? No, say no more of gratitude. Some day, some near day, I hope to tell you all I now feel."

Red River cast upon his young leader a sidelong look of astonishment. Could this individual, whose voice broke, whose tongue stammered, whose agitation was almost aspen—could this be the unshakable Captain Moonlight? Red River began to distrust his ears and eyes. He went out into the darkness of the night to meditate upon the strangeness of things. As he stepped across the threshold, he heard behind him the voice of Ethel asking:

"And your name, please?"

"Moonlight," was the reply. "You may call me Moonlight, if you will."

Following the retreat of Red River, Moonlight set himself to explain her surroundings to Ethel.

"You will have this house to yourself, of course," he said. "Red River and I will find quarters elsewhere."

Then he showed her how she had but to let down a great oaken bar, and the heavy door would be closed against any outside force.

"It's the only door," he explained, "and since the three windows are defended by bars too closely set to admit even a cat, you may make yourself as safe as you please. Also, that couch of bear skins and Navajo blankets will offer you a fairly soft sleeping place."

Having said this much, and possessing no genius for small talk, Moonlight lapsed into silence. He would have liked well to converse with Ethel about her people, but he knew so much of Robert, and his

meditated villainy toward himself, that he was obliged to forbear. He remembered the photograph in his pocket, and was for showing it to her. That, too, he put off for a better occasion, on the same argument that kept him silent concerning Ethel's home surroundings. What wore upon him not a little was a besetting consciousness of being awkwardly unfinished and uncouth. The fineness of Ethel affected him like a criticism; he was proud of it, in love with it, and afraid of it all in one. It made him know himself to be as rudely, crudely savage as a cinnamon bear; and yet he would not have had that fineness diminished by one least fraction. It might set her above and beyond his love; but she would still be within reach of his worship. In this connection, he remarked as wondrous, and not without some sense of loss on his own part, that all of the bragging self-confidence which had carried him so insolently until now, was oozed away completely. In her presence he felt that everything about him, his dress, his manner, his looks, his speech, even his admiration, not to say adoration, needed apology.

Ethel could almost read what was passing in his thoughts. She settled herself more confidently among the bear skins upon which she was seated, as the result of it. And yet she herself could think of little or nothing to say. Certainly, it was no time for the commonplace. She caught herself stealing a glance at the chiseled outlines of his face. Those marvelous eyes, that had frozen Robert, were a study of never flagging interest, as they deepened and softened in the firelight, or lighted up with concern when some thought for her comfort or safety occurred to him.

She could see that he was woefully fearful of offending her or gaining a poor place in her esteem; and this of itself was like a compliment. The compliment likewise was granted edge and flavor, because all the time she could feel and find safety for herself in that atmosphere of the invincible which was parcel of him.

"It is true," thought Ethel, "he fears me, but there his fear ends. Yes"—she smiled softly—"I am quite sure, and therein lies the flattery of it, that I am his only weakness."

Ethel could not avoid reflecting on the steady assurance wherewith both Moonlight and Red River had received her news of the intended descent upon the Dove's Nest. They accepted it as they might any most careless piece of information, while evincing every turgid intention to be ferociously prepared. Therein abode the marvel of these men; and the very thought of it would shorten her breath, and quicken her pulse, to prove her admiration. She found herself placing implicit confidence in these dauntless ones, and by the light of their courage discovered her own.

"It isn't hard, I find," she thought, "for the woman to be brave when the man is brave. His heart is her heart in a peril such as this, and she is strong as he is strong."

While Ethel was pleasing herself with these scraps of psychical philosophy, Moonlight said diffidently that he would now go.

"You must be extremely tired," he argued, apologetically, "and ought to rest. Be sure and let me hear you drop that bar in place, when I have closed the door behind me." He paused a moment on the threshold—"You are very brave," he went on, "and

so I shall say a further word. Pedro of the Knife, with his Kiowas, should be here about break of day. No matter what occurs, don't unbar the door. Lie close on those bear skins, and avoid the windows. An arrow, or a bullet gone astray, might else find you out by accident."

"Tell me," she said wistfully, "are we in great danger?"

He laughed with a hardy coolness wherein Ethel found comfort.

"Miss Ethel, I give you my honor," he returned, "that Pedro of the Knife, and his Kiowas, are the ones who should talk of danger. Whatever is our risk, theirs is ten-fold greater. No, I pledge you my word that you shall see your friends again; and that within forty-eight hours, though all the Kiowas that ever yelped along the Canadian stood in the way."

When Moonlight was gone, Ethel lay down upon the bear skins. She did not expect to sleep; what she had encountered, and what was still to come, should be sufficient to scare away slumber from eyelids less nervous than were hers. The sequel disappointed her. She was thinking on Aunt Tilda, and Robert, and a score more matters, each a reason for sadness, when the sweet release came that sent her away to a world of dreams. Nor were they dreams of horror and of sudden death; but ran on altars, and priests, and orange flowers, and to one with gray eyes who was standing by her side.

"What's your little game, Cap'n?" asked Red River, when he was joined by Moonlight.

"My game is this. Now observe: the fire in the house will die out and leave it dark. We shall build

one in the camp house, and have it attractively burning when Pedro of the Knife and his Indians arrive. They will count on a surprise. I shall leave the great gate open as it usually is, and the camp-house door ajar to show the flickering light of the fire. We'll let them creep up without interference, and enter the corral. The camp house will draw them like a magnet; they will, on seeing the fire, think to find us there. That should take them all on tiptoe across the corral. When they are crowded about the camp house, some inside, others at the door, will be our time. Have your rifle, your six-shooters and your knife. With twenty-six shots, and our bowies to fall back upon, we shall show ourselves as both slow and clumsy, if many escape."

"Good!" ejaculated the pleased Red River, in high indorsement of Moonlight's sentiments and intentions. Then to himself: "He may be timid of that little girl, but, touchin' Kiowas an' similar varmints, them apprehensions has in no wise knocked his horns off."

Moonlight stationed Red River under the lee of the north wall. His instructions were, when the enemy had come well within the corral, to close and lock the gate behind them, against their getting out. Moonlight would take position in the deep shadows near the spring.

"When them Kiowas is hoverin' about the camp-house door," said Red River, repeating his instructions, "I'm to slam-to the gate. Then I'm to wheel, an' go to shootin' into the flock permiscus."

"Also, you are not to waste a cartridge."

It was toward two o'clock in the morning, and daybreak a round four hours away. A silence like the

silence of death lay on the Dove's Nest. The moon was just showing above the eastern skyline, and served to intensify the darkness which prevailed within the corral. Suddenly a slight rasping sound was heard, and the next moment a tall Indian bounded over the wall and dropped to the ground like a cat. Before he could gather himself together, two cable-like arms were thrown about him, and with a crunching hug that all but cracked his bones, he was torn from his feet and hurled to the ground with a crash.

"Waugh!" he cried, gurgling and choking. "Does my son not know his father, Ironjacket?"

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE BATTLE AT THE DOVE'S NEST

IRONJACKET, on being released, arose to his feet, and began rubbing his arms and ribs in a manner of profound thought and circumspection. It was as though he were a horse, and he about to fix a value. His self-investigation over, he turned to Moonlight.

"My son hugs like a bear! Yes, his arms are the arms of a grizzly!"

"I did not know my father. Also, my father spoke just in time."

As Moonlight said this, he slipped his nine-inch bowie back into its sheath with a click.

"Yes; Ironjacket came near joining Sun Boy," responded the Kiowa placidly. "Now," he continued, dismissing his reception as an incident ended with and done, "I shall tell my son why I am here. It is because I gave a promise when my medicine came back to be ever near him when blows were struck."

Ironjacket told how he had heard of the work of Pedro of the Knife among the Kiowas.

"I was with another band," he said, "but my ear was to the ground. I am not sorry; for these are bad Kiowas, whom it is good to kill."

Ironjacket related how he had followed in the wake of Pedro of the Knife and his cohorts. Also, he said

that at sun-down they had moved their camp to within a mile of the Dove's Nest.

"They want to be near my son when the time comes to strike," he explained.

"Did my father count them?"

"There were so many," returned Ironjacket, opening and closing his ten fingers three times, after the fashion of aboriginal mathematicians.

"Thirty!"

"But now there are two less. Black Antelope and Dull Lance were slain by my son at the Red Deer Ridge."

"That is true," assented Moonlight, who understood in the Indians named those two from whom he had rescued Ethel. "They made war on a girl, as Sun Boy did."

"My son always defends the squaws," observed Ironjacket admiringly. "It is a good sign."

Moonlight told how he had already received word of the designs of Pedro of the Knife, and what plans he, with Red River, had laid to meet them. Ironjacket was so complacent as to approve the plans. He believed with Moonlight as to the hour of attack.

"They should come at daybreak," said he. "They think to surprise my son in his blankets. I lay in their camp last night when it was dark, and heard this. But they will be fooled, for my son is wide awake like a lynx. When we shall have killed as many as we can, and driven off the rest, I have a gift for my son."

Moonlight paid no heed to the mention of a gift, although later he was led to remember it.

The talk between Moonlight and Ironjacket had been conducted in whispers. Red River, who had

come across from his concealment, took no part in it. Now, when an understanding had been reached, he returned to his post, and the silent waiting was resumed.

The hours wore slowly on. Pencils of bluish-gray began to shoot upward in the east, and the air became heavy with the smell of morning. Red River was lying in the shadow of the 'dobe fence, to the left of the great gateway, which stood open temptingly. Through a spy-hole between two 'dobe bricks, he could see the expanse of moonlighted plain to the north. Moonlight, on his side, by a similar device, could also keep watch. It was on Red River's front, however, that the enemy were expected.

Suddenly Red River lighted a match, holding it close to the ground where it could not be seen from the outside. It burned for a moment, and then was extinguished. Moonlight understood; it was the signal arranged between Red River and himself, and it meant that the foe were in sight. A moment later a shadowy crouching form, on all fours like a wolf, showed in the open gateway, and paused as though surveying the scene inside. Presently the dim form disappeared.

Moonlight cast a glance at the camp house. The blaze which had been started in the fireplace by himself and Red River for strategic purposes was visible in intermittent flickerings through the partially closed door. The main building, in which reposed the sleeping Ethel, with her happy visions of orange flowers and wedding marches, had become utterly dark. Moonlight could not refrain from creeping along in the shadow, and softly trying the door. It was securely

barred, as he had directed. Relieved on that head, he returned noiselessly to Ironjacket.

Ten minutes passed; evidently that scout was making his report of Dove's Nest conditions to Pedro of the Knife. Abruptly, a half dozen ghostly figures appeared in the gateway, while others crowded at their backs. One and all they moved with the wool-foot stillness of cats; as many specters would not have been more nearly soundless.

There was a momentary pause. Then, like shadows they passed into the corral, and crossed to the camp house. Softly a foremost one pushed open the door; with that, a silent half dozen seemed to melt away into the dark interior. The moment for which Moonlight had planned and waited was at hand.

It was the big buffalo gun that broke the spell. With the flash and the crash of it a Kiowa went down. As he dropped with a shriek, Red River's rifle spoke from across the corral, and a second savage fell a-top the first. Then Red River slammed to the big gate, and the splitting voices of the six-shooters took up the music of that death dance.

Not the least disconcerting element, to the invading Kiowas, was the ringing yell wherewith Ironjacket proclaimed his presence, and began his fierce participation in the bloody work. The followers of Pedro of the Knife had not counted on that yell. They had been told only of two white men, who were to be seized in their blankets. To be stormed at by unexpected buffalo guns, and then raked and re-raked by six-shooters from two directions at once, had been discouraging. When, however, as capping that sleet of low-flying lead, the hoarse war-shouts of Ironjacket

were heard, fear claimed their hearts, and a stampede set in.

As one man, those Kiowas who could broke back for the gateway. To their dismay it had been closed. The movement, none the less, brought their whole force like an avalanche upon Red River, who—his pistols being now empty—met the shock with his knife. Not that he was to be left to fight the red mob alone; Moonlight and Ironjacket were there as soon almost as the Kiowas. It was a charge of two: Moonlight with his bowie, Ironjacket flourishing a war axe, which glanced and shimmered in the light of the breaking day most vengefully.

Moonlight and Ironjacket were separated by a dozen feet, when they struck the struggling mass of savages about the gate. The former's purpose was to reach the stubborn Red River. The lives of all the Kiowas on the Rabbit Ear would not pay the debt if he were slain!

Grasping the nearest savage by the shoulder, Moonlight bore him over backward with enormous strength, and drove his knife into his side to the steel guard. Pushing his victim off the dripping blade, he fairly cut and killed his way to Red River, already down beneath a heap of yelling, struggling Kiowas. Right and left Moonlight stabbed and slashed. Only one owned the hardihood to offer battle; and he was Pedro of the Knife. His knife clashed for one moment on that of Moonlight's, when by a fencing trick, which the latter's measureless strength of wrist made possible, the blade of Pedro of the Knife was swept from his hand. Almost with the same motion Moonlight sheathed his own knife in the Mexican's heart.

"Pedro of the Ear," cried Moonlight, "I owed you that!"

As he stepped across the writhing form, he became aware of some one at his elbow. He wheeled like a flash with ready blade; then he staggered back in astonishment. That one at his elbow was Ethel. Eyes bright, bosom heaving, she stood like one in a trance. One would have said that the look of Moonlight fascinated her. There was reason that it should. Coming upon him as she did in a climax of battle, his face read like a page torn from some book of doom. The expression froze while it drew her to him.

"You here!" cried Moonlight.

The next moment he whipped her up and bore her inside.

"I watched from the window," she panted, "until I felt that I must go to you! It was awful; and yet it was grand!"

Moonlight gazed upon her with a sharp narrowness. Even in the darkness of the room, he saw with a glow that she was neither shaken nor hysterical. Exalted, and carried beyond herself by the sight and the sound of war, she had come forth to be near him; and yet, in that whirl of those emotions which tossed her, terror possessed no place. Rather it was a blind, unthinking worship of her hero. Live or die, she must be by his side! Now she stood with parted lips and burning eyes, breathing adoration. She had slipped off her civilization as though it were a garment, and was as primitively savage as himself.

His eyes met hers, and their souls surveyed each other. The war raged outside; they minded it not. Without word, and as one who but claims his right,

he drew her close to his bosom and kissed her lips. There was no struggle, no remonstrance; she lay in his arms as passively as any netted bird. He kissed her again and again; and those kisses were as bonds between them, holding each to each till death.

It was Ironjacket who at last shattered this pretty picture. Tall and somber, he strode suddenly in at the open doorway. Naked to the waist, daubed with his war colors of black and red, tall feathers waving upward from his scalplock, hatchet running blood, the fierce Kiowa made a figure of fear. And yet Ethel looked upon him steadily.

"And wherefore no?" said her warmly beating heart. "Is *he* not here?"

"Waugh!" said Ironjacket, composedly. "I did not know my son had a wife." Then, pointing with his sanguinary war axe toward the scene of recent strife: "They are gone!—all save those who are dead. Yes, the others so feared my son that they became as deer. There was no gate, but they jumped like mule-eared deer. Like water down hill they ran away! But so many"—here, with the fingers of his disengaged hand, Ironjacket counted off seventeen—"did not run. No, they were too dead."

Moonlight stood with one arm about Ethel, as Ironjacket made his report. Submerged in that new sensation of victorious love, he hardly heard this story of a victory of another sort.

It was the thought of Red River that restored him to his old-time self. He took Ethel's hands in his, and kissed first one and then the other.

"Dear one," he said, "stay here!"

Moonlight brushed by Ironjacket, while Ethel sank

upon the couch of bear skins, flushed, beautiful, all else forgotten and swallowed up in a fathomless happiness that was hers.

Ironjacket followed Moonlight.

"Is it my son's friend?" he called after him. "Is it the Red River one? I pulled him from beneath the Kiowas; and, although he stood straight and strong like a pine tree in his moccasins, he had been hurt by a knife."

Moonlight found Red River leaning against the corral gate. His senses were in that daze of battle —a sort of fog of fighting—which seizes on some natures when the war is hand to hand and long drawn out. It is a fashion of self-hypnotism, and comes of a too much concentration of courage. Those who have been upon a battle field when the fight was at its height have seen it!—a drunkenness of the heart, it is brought about by quaffing too deeply the cup of one's own valor.

As Moonlight hurried across, Red River bent upon him a blurred, unseeing eye. Then he stretched out his hand, as if to invoke encomium upon the stark work that had been done.

"Cap'n," he murmured, in thick, exultant tones, "we're shore what I call dandies at our business!"

Having paid himself and the others this tribute, the doughty Red River sank to the ground.

Moonlight bent over him; a moment's search served to show that he had received a serious though not fatal knife thrust in the side. Moonlight carried the fainting Red River into the camp house, and laid him on a piled-up blanket bed. Ironjacket, who like all Indians, was almost as much surgeon as warrior, with

cold water and bandages proceeded to dress the wound. At the feel of the cold water Red River opened his eyes; a word or two showed him weak from loss of blood, but with wits restored.

Leaving him to the care of Ironjacket, Moonlight went back to Ethel.

"Ethel," said he. Then, pausing, he faltered, "I may call you Ethel, may I not?" Her look gave assent, and her glowing cheek confirmed it. "Ethel," he resumed, and now he spoke with the ring of confidence, while his tones took on that color of blended love, ownership and command so dear to a woman's heart when coming from him she loves, "you must promise! You are not to so much as look into the corral, until I say you may. No, you shall not be captive to these horrors long; and meanwhile here is an outside window from which you may safely review the world."

Moonlight spoke with cheerful composure. He felt it incumbent upon his manhood to protect in every way the sensibilities of this lady of his heart. It pleased his vanity and puffed him up a trifle that Ethel should so readily acquiesce. At this he could not refrain from strutting once or twice across the room, in a way which brought back that almost forgotten *baile*—how long ago it seemed!—at the Cross-8. Only now it pleased and did not vex her.

Of a sudden a new thought came to him. He groped in the inner pocket of his coat and brought forth the photograph which Mr. Hanrahan's kindness had furnished. It was a brilliant idea, he argued; for it would occupy Ethel, to the exclusion of the grewsome panorama just beyond the door.

"See!" he said, extending the photograph, "here is a puzzle that baffles me; and yet you may solve it."

Ethel took the picture wonderingly.

"Do you recognize it?" he asked.

"Recognize it?" she repeated. "Why, it is from Aunt Tilda's book of photographs! It is the picture of her nephew Alan Gordon."

"And of no one else?"

The voice was so strange that it drew her eyes to his face. In an instant the truth overwhelmed her. She came a step closer, her gaze crossing his. Then in a whisper of amazement, with a note of gladness running through, she cried:

"You—you are Alan Gordon!"

There followed a cataract of explanation. Before it ceased, Moonlight and Ethel had all things made clear to them.

It was he who said at the finish:

"And, dear one, whatever comes, your Aunt Tilda —for as yet I can hardly call her mine—must not know of this plot of Robert's. Remember, she must never know."

Ethel nodded assent.

"She loves Robert," she said, "as though he were her own. She will love you, too; but it would break her heart to hear the truth of Robert."

Ethel went to the window from which the prospect was innocent, to cool her hot cheeks in the fresh breeze. Instantly she uttered an exclamation of joy.

"Jet!" she cried. "Here comes my own Jet! And two men are with him! Yes"—her excitement mounting—"and one is dear, good Professor Doremus!"

True enough! As Ethel had proclaimed, the Professor and Jeff, having with them the abandoned Jet, picked up by the way, rode in to the Dove's Nest.

At sight of the hideous tokens of strife that, twisted and pang-distorted, marred the scene, the Professor looked grave. The case-hardened Jeff could not repress his applause.

"Looks like you'd been havin' stirrin' times, Cap'n!" cried he, as Moonlight came up.

"I am the more glad to see you, Uncle Jeff," returned Moonlight dryly, "since the Dove's Nest would be the better for a little house-cleaning. I feel sure that, now you are here, you can be relied upon to attend to it."

"'Uncle Jeff,'" repeated that worthy, disgustedly. "As I says, whenever you hails me as 'Uncle Jeff,' it's preeliminary to something disagreeable."

Moonlight led the Professor inside to Ethel. Then he said he would go and see to Red River, and so left the two alone.

He returned after half an hour, to find the good Professor among his warmest partisans.

"And you are the son of Alan Gordon!" cried the old man, taking his hand. "Well! well! It illustrates the strangeness of truth!" Moonlight's hand closed on the Professor's slim fingers like a vise; but that scientist, in the tumult of his feelings, never flinched. "And you are the young Alan Gordon!" he went on. "Believe me, it rejoices my old heart. It doubly rejoices me; for Ethel has done me the honor to tell me all."

The good Professor went outside, and found Jeff

coolly tossing the dead Kiowas into the big ranch wagon, which on other days Red River devoted to buffalo hides. The indurated Jeff had just thrown in all that was mortal of Pedro of the Knife, and appeared to enjoy a cocky sense of satisfaction in so doing.

"As big an assassin, Professor," he vouchsafed, referring to Pedro of the Knife, "as ever cocks a gun!" Then he added with a deep sigh, "You an' me missed a heap in not bein' yere."

"Are you going to bury them, friend Jeff?" asked the Professor.

"Which I'm goin' to kyart 'em over beyond that swell a mile away, an' then dump 'em out a whole lot. I shall leave buryin' 'em to the Panhandle firm of 'Raven & Coyote, Undertakers & Fooneral Directors.' Thar," he concluded, pointing to a huge raven sailing overhead, as though already scenting a prey—"thar's the head of the firm right now."

"Ah, I see," remarked the Professor, surveying the black repulsive bird, "a raven! Scientifically, of the *genus corvus*. A striking specimen, too, I should say," he concluded, as he watched the huge fowl slant its wings to the wind.

Ironjacket came up, and said that now he had made the wounded Red River easy, he would bring in the gift which he designed for his son.

"Where is it?" asked Moonlight, who, in the hurry of the morning's many events, had forgotten the promised benevolence.

"I shall be gone until the sun is there," responded Ironjacket, pointing to what should mean the hour of three, if the sky were a clock and the sun its hour

hand. "Southwind and the Firelight are watching over my gift, to see that it does not run away."

Ironjacket returned sharp to the hour. Behind him, on their ponies, rode the meek Southwind and the lovely Firelight. The Professor at sight of them radiated a welcome.

Something like a long sack lay across the pony of Ironjacket in front of the rider. Before the latter dismounted, he tumbled this object off with as little ceremony as though it were a pack of beaver pelts.

"Waugh!" he observed, with an urbane gesture; "there is the gift I bring my son."

"The gift" groaned and opened its eyes, as it lay bound and helpless on the grass. A closer look showed nothing other than Don Anton Baca himself.

"He talked with Pedro of the Knife last night," explained Ironjacket, "as I listened. He said that my son was to be burned at the stake. But he was too big a coward to come for my son with the others, so he left Pedro of the Knife and went away to hide. I followed, and caught and tied him. Then I carried him to Southwind, that she might watch while I came to fight for my son. The battle is over and won; now my son may burn this man who would have burned him."

The brow of Moonlight grew dark; the old remorseless savage in him began to struggle to the surface. He was all for hanging Don Anton to the big center beam at the gable end of the camp house.

Ethel gently interposed.

"For the sake of the Doña Inez," she pleaded, "who sent you warning."

"You need not go further than your own wish, little sweetheart," said Moonlight.

Don Anton was given a pony and a warning. He was advised to put himself back on the Concha without delay.

Ironjacket looked discouraged at this untoward softening on the part of Moonlight. When Don Anton, sore and battered, had vanished with the pony granted him, he drew Moonlight aside.

"My son," said he solemnly, with the reproachful tail of his eye on Ethel, "remember! The breath of a squaw will dull the warrior's knife."

When Jeff drove in from what he called the "obsequies," he brought with him a bandit-seeming Mexican who he said belonged at the Cross-8.

"Which I nacherally thought," explained Jeff, the sagacious, "that most likely, Professor, you'd want to send word how the little Ethel girl is safe, thataway. This yere greaser is one of the Red Bull's riders, an' he's on his way in to the home ranch at this writin'. What's easier than sendin' a message by him?"

The thought was timely. The good Professor scribbled one line, "Ethel is safe!" and, signing it "Your devoted P. D.," dispatched it to Aunt Tilda.

"Nor can I thank you too heartily, friend Jeff," said he, when the Mexican had gone his northward way. "It will cut short a flood of torturing anxieties."

That night was the happiest ever seen at the Dove's Nest. With the thousand and one matters, romantic and commonplace, to be threshed out among them, Ethel, the Professor and Moonlight were in animated converse until far into the hours.

Jeff would have retired early, but the sight of Firelight, in the rôle of nurse to the wounded Red River, operated to disturb him. He called Moonlight into the corral for consultation.

"For, d'ye see, Cap'n," he explained, "Red River, bein' slashed up that-away, an' plumb weak, is likely to turn sentimental; an' once he gets sentimental, thar's no figgerin' on what eediocy he'll commit. Which, unless we cuts in between him an' this yere little squaw, it wouldn't amaze me none if the next thing we hears he's old Ironjacket's son-in-law."

Moonlight declined to interfere.

"All right, Cap'n," returned Jeff, turning both high and virtuous, "at least I've done my dooty. I yereby washes my hands of the business, an' shall now roll in for a much-needed snooze."

## CHAPTER XXIV

### LOVE GREW AND TREASURE CAME

At the suggestion of Ethel, who was thinking on Aunt Tilda and her anxieties, an early morning start was made for the Cross-8. Ironjacket said that he would remain and keep house at the Dove's Nest. He explained that, after so fatiguing a battle, he must smoke many days to recover himself. Meanwhile, Red River would be watched over by the dusky Firelight. The arrangement was in a high degree satisfactory to all involved, not least among whom was Red River, who approved feebly but with emphasis.

Jet, by a miracle of equine recuperation, presented four good legs for the journey. This was fortunate, since any other pony about the Dove's Nest would have died outright, if subjected to the awful ordeal of side saddle and skirts. The party set out betimes, the Professor and Jeff riding ahead in scientific conference, while the lovers brought up the lagging rear. The latter had eyes only for one another; and, remembering the broken character of the trail, it was just as well that Jet and President were not so purblind.

Jeff and the Professor had much to feed the flame of conversation. About four of that very morning a keen, dry, driving wind had started up from the exact quarter of the compass that should best test the sand-removing value of their wind-break. Jeff routed the Professor from beneath his blankets at

the unearthly hour of five, to consider that favoring gale and its effects. The hopeful pair had been up ever since.

"An', Professor," observed Jeff, "this yere breeze, which is only a good, headlong sort of gale back yere on the Palo Duro, will be blowin' a simoon on the Canadian; sech bein' the nacher of Panhandle weather."

Jeff declared that from a certain highest point in the trail, ten miles north of the Dove's Nest, some dusty evidences of their experiment's success might be visible.

"For," he explained, "from that p'int, Professor, we can see plumb to the river. If this wind is tossin' our sand-hill on its horns that-away, it looks like it should shorely kick up dust enough to be visible thar-from to the naked eye."

So eager were our engineers, that they lashed forward at a pace which not only left Ethel and Moonlight behind, but rendered Socrates quite breathless. Their haste was repaid, however, when, upon mounting to that tableland which threw open before them a partial view of the far-off valley of the Canadian, their vision was refreshed by the sight of a gigantic dust-banner, which appeared to rise from the ground before them like a huge smoke. It stretched away to the east in a dun-colored cloud, as opaque as a wall of rock, all across the entire horizon. If their knowledge had not furnished the explanation, our scientific ones might have feared that a volcano had suddenly set up business in the Panhandle.

As they gazed, they all but tore each other from the saddle in a whirlwind of mutual congratulation.

"Which the trick is ours, Professor," cried the ebullient Jeff, "or I'm no jedge of eucher!"

The Professor, in equal ecstasy, looked with rapt eyes upon that snuff-hued banner which the winds were flinging aloft.

"A pillar of fire by night," he murmured rather irrelevantly—"a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day! Friend Jeff, I verily believe that our deductions are about to be justified."

The Professor and Jeff could talk of naught save their dust-cloud. In their zeal to witness results, they continued to drive forward with all possible speed. They had told nothing of their canvas arrangements to Moonlight; and since he owned thoughts only for the beautiful Ethel, it would have been a waste of time and frankness if they had. Concerning that dust-banner, festooned against the northern sky line, they had their hopes and their fears altogether to themselves.

"And yet, friend Jeff," observed the Professor ruefully, as a thought of duty seized him, "I will not be able to go with you this evening. I must first restore Ethel to the arms of her aunt. I fear I shall not be free to join you at the theater of our experiment until to-morrow."

The Professor spoke sadly, for the heat of scientific interest was high in his veins.

"Never mind, Professor," observed Jeff generously, "we won't move a wheel until you show up."

Much that was sweet and true and tender did Ethel and Moonlight say to one another, during the long ride to the Cross-8. President and Jet behaved like lifelong friends; and this concession permitted the

lovers to ride so close to each other as to take hold of hands—an inestimable privilege under the circumstances. They made no plans beyond that one matter already resolved upon, that no word of Robert's perfidy should be given to either Aunt Tilda or the Professor.

"It shall be our secret, sweetheart," covenanted Moonlight—"ours and his."

"It is all so strange," said Ethel; "my finding you! And yet, since I know you to be Alan Gordon, it seems as though I had been with you always."

Ethel re-told how, broken-hearted, old Alan Gordon had drooped into his grave when he found that his son was gone.

"How could you remain away?" she exclaimed.

"I believed that he hated me," returned Moonlight mournfully. "My whole childhood had been a battle—a daily war with him. He seemed hard and hateful to me. I believed him, too, when he described me as a 'Throwback,' and declared that I would be his disgrace, and the disgrace of his house. That was why I left. And then I tried only to forget that there was such a name as Gordon, or such a place as old Somerset."

Ethel, unconsciously, became Moonlight's preceptress in civilization, and it was marvelous what strides he made.

"And to think," ran his self-condemnations, "what have been my ideals! I have looked upon bloodshed as upon a virtue, and was flattered to be thought a butcher. And my father loved me after all! God! how we mislead each other! how we mislead ourselves!"

Ethel watched the sadness on his brow, and the melancholy in those eyes of gray. He caught her glance; instantly the cloud vanished, and love, like a sunrise, supplanted that gray-eyed melancholy.

The quartette rode together until within sight of the mud walls of the Cross-8. Here Moonlight and Jeff bore off to the right for the Monk's Hill, while Ethel with the Professor went forward.

"To-morrow, sweetheart," whispered Moonlight.

As Moonlight and Jeff rounded the toe of the Monk's Hill, the former, for the earliest time, became aware of that mighty dust-banner. Even then he did not link it with those engineering operations of the worthy Jeff.

"What!" he cried, "a sand storm? Queer, too," he continued. "Seems to start all in one place."

The pair rounded the wooded promontory, and came upon the Professor's wind-break, whimpering and cracking in the gale like the sails of a ship. Moonlight was amazed; Jeff, the voluble, hastily but enthusiastically explained.

"An' see thar!" cried Jeff excitedly; "I'm a Siwash if it ain't worked!"

Sure enough, the canvas wind-break was now an isolated creature—a thing by itself. As its promoter had prophesied, the wind, by its guidance, had brought about the disappearance of the sand-hill. The last of that breeze-constructed elevation was still visible, in the shape of a single cone of sand, which stood out on the flat full one hundred yards from the base of the Monk's Hill. The winds still held their dance about it, like morrice players round a maypole, and from its snuffy apex a dusty column was constantly

rising like smoke. Clearly, its future was written; the last of that sand-hill, the tunneling whereof had given Jeff so much trouble, would be wiped out within the limits of another day.

The intervening stretch between the wind-whipped cone and the base of the Monk's Hill lay as clean and swept as a brickyard floor. Not a spear of vegetation showed; it was the raw hard-pan, dead and desolate. Across it meandered the ribbon-like stream which Jeff had attempted in his tunneling to trace. Moved of one thought, Moonlight and Jeff spurred for the point at the base of the Monk's Hill, from which the stream flowed forth. As they reached it one of Jeff's Mexicans rushed up; he was almost in tears.

"By the machinations of the devil," cried the lachrymose one, "our hill has been made to take its flight. Now there can be no more tunneling, no more timbering! All our digging and our chopping go for naught!"

He explained that for the safety of the hill he and his comrades had prayed and told their beads all night. Prayers were useless, however; the hill had gone its windy way.

The little stream had its origin in a cave, as the monk's note described. The cave was choked of sand, but that should mean no more than an hour's work for Jeff's shovel brigade. Strong as was the impulse in the bosoms of both Moonlight and Jeff to set to digging at once, they fought it down, and deferred operations until the Professor should join them on the morrow.

"Which I told him we would," explained Jeff. "Bein' a scientist that-away, an' this yere canvas con-

traption his excloosive idee, nacherally he's plumb eager to be present when we makes the final turn."

With the gray of dawn the Professor with Socrates joined Moonlight and Jeff. His face was white and worn.

"Alan," said he, addressing Moonlight gravely, "I bring bad news. Your cousin Robert is dead. It was a strange deathbed," continued the Professor, after a moment of silence. Sinking his voice mysteriously, he went on. "There was that about his going which might almost prove a power of second sight as the near precedent of death. Robert died at daybreak, yesterday morning; his Aunt Tilda was bending over him. Suddenly, starting up he cried:

"'What time is it?'

"'The day is breaking,' she said.

"'Daybreak!' he shrieked, tossing his arms. 'Daybreak! And they are killing Cousin Alan at the Dove's Nest!'"

"Those were his last words," concluded the Professor, still with lowered, dubious voice. "As he uttered them blood gushed from his mouth, and he fell back dead."

Jeff, for what seemed to him a proper space, restrained his impatience out of respect for the Professor and the death message he bore. When he deemed the proprieties protected, he suggested shovels and an investigation of the spring. The good Professor approved the motion.

"Friend Jeff," he said, "I think, as you do, that we might better complete our work here. Afterward we will repair to the Cross-8, where the coming of one of us is anxiously awaited. Yes," he continued, ad-

dressing Moonlight, "Ethel and I have told the miracle of our discovery of you to your Aunt Tilda. She could hardly train her senses to believe the news. So deep was her joy that, even in her hour of sorrow, our story so took possession of her she could hardly think or talk of aught but you."

Moonlight made no reply; he would not trust himself with any topic that was to bring Robert's name to his lips. He listened to the Professor, and then, murmuring something that sounded like acquiescence, motioned to Jeff to get the Mexicans to work.

There was an hour's hard digging before the cave was freed from the choking sand. While the shovelmen moiled, the Professor cast about him admiring and self-gratulatory glances. He exchanged whispered compliments with Jeff. For there is no victory like a scientific victory; no Alexander like your Alexander of invention who, on the battlefield of some experiment, finds himself a conqueror. Wherefore, the good Professor, who now laid bare to Moonlight even unto each minutest angle, that theory of the canvas wind-break upon which he and Jeff had gone to work, found much to pleasantly hold him, while the Mexicans scattered the sand.

After the cave had been cleared, Moonlight set the Mexicans to digging out the spring itself. When the water in the spring showed about three feet in depth, he dismissed the Mexicans and took a spade himself. If the dead Don Lopez's treasure were found, he did not propose that it be made part of Panhandle gossip; he, with the Professor and Jeff, should be the only ones to know. As promoting the end in view, Jeff marshaled the Mexicans back to camp, gave them

a gallon of rum to induce forgetfulness, and bade them regard the occasion as a picnic; a command which, with the help of light hearts and the paraphernalia required by a game of monte, they obeyed in spirit and letter.

Moonlight drove his spade straight downward into what seemed the natural heart of the spring. By working it to and fro he forced it deeper and deeper, until not only had the handle of the spade disappeared, but his arm was immersed to the elbow.

Luck was with him; at last the spade grated against some substance that gave forth a metallic sound. He had expected to find the flat stone written of by the monk Jose, but the water made sand of that long years ago. Thus, the spade went home without pause to that desirable Don Lopez casket.

Feeling his way with the spade, Moonlight succeeded in working under the drowned treasure, and with a steady, prying motion began slowly to loosen it in its sandy resting place. At that Jeff, whose excitement was climbing fast, plunged into the spring bodily, with no more hesitation than would have been manifested by a Newfoundland dog, and going head and ears under, seized upon the casket with two hands and brought it dripping to the surface. Giving a great, victorious heave, he pitched it out upon the flat, dry ground.

The steel outer box, being rust-rotten, cracked and chipped as it struck the hard ground. A blow or two with the flat of the heavy spade, and it fell all away in pieces, leaving a dullish yellow oblong cube, somewhat less in size than a common cigar box. This yellow cube, stained and discolored by certain traces

of mineral which the waters of the spring contained, was that inner golden casket, described by the dead Jose as enclosing those Don Lopez rubies, of which Moonlight had so often dreamed.

Moonlight picked up the casket and dried it. Gold though it was, it possessed no great weight. In one side was bored a small round hole, that might have once received a key. On what should be the top, was a cross carved in raised gold. There was no tracing, no inscription; except for the discoloration, the box, a plain, pale yellow, was unadorned.

"Smash it open!" cried Jeff.

But Moonlight spake otherwise. "Not now," said he. "We shall open it later." Then, observing Jeff's disappointment, "you shall be present; I promise you that."

Two months have come and gone, and our friends are at the Bar-Z. They buried Robert on the crest of the Monk's Hill, at the base of the huge rock whereon the dying Jose carved his cross. Aunt Tilda felt the going of Robert; but if she had lost one nephew, she had found another, and her grief was offset by as great a joy.

One bright spring-like afternoon who should ride up to the Bar-Z but the Red Bull and the fair Doña Inez. The Red Bull explained his mission. There was to be a festival at the Cross-8; the brave Don Anton would wed the glowing Doña Inez. The Red Bull hoped that his neighbors of the Bar-Z would grant the ceremony the honor of their presence.

"My daughter," whispered the Red Bull to Aunt Tilda, "loves your Ethel; and besides I want the

wedding to bring peace between Captain Moonlight and Don Anton."

Aunt Tilda urged the recent death of Robert. To plunge into weddings seemed to her improper. The question of friendship between her new-found nephew and Don Anton was the less important, she said, since they were one and all about to quit the Panhandle and return to old Somerset. Besides, she was by no means sure of her new nephew's reception of those peace proposals. Aunt Tilda loved him with her whole motherly heart as one who, being lost, was found again; but she by no means felt sure of his inclinations. He still had somber half-savage moments when he was hard to understand.

The diplomatic Red Bull met Aunt Tilda's objections in detail, and confuted them like a Christian. As to the last, he gave it as his belief that Moonlight would do whatever Ethel desired.

"And, of course," said the Red Bull, "one so good and gentle will favor forgiveness, forgetfulness and peace."

The Doña Inez talked with Ethel and Moonlight.

"I have to thank you for a warning," observed Moonlight. "I wonder sometimes what I did to deserve your interest."

"Bah!" returned the Doña Inez, snapping her fingers like castanets; "you danced well. Besides, I didn't warn you; I warned your Ethel."

"And Don Anton?" asked Ethel.

"He is at Chaparita," responded the Doña Inez lightly, "coaxing back his vanity, and forgetting many things. However, I shall marry him; and you must be present."

The weight of public opinion, as represented by Ethel, the Professor and Jeff, was against Aunt Tilda. As for Moonlight, he was mere clay in the hands of potter Ethel. Personally, with that callous indifference to feuds which is characteristic of the Southwest, he was content to be at peace with Don Anton. The more, since he might at any moment turn that peace into war, if it pleased him so to do.

Beyond all, however, the news of that impending Cross-8 wedding had put a wondrous notion into his head. He confided the brilliant thought to Ethel, who blushed, tried to look annoyed, and failed. She squabbled a little in opposition, but permitted Moonlight to defeat her at that squabbling; which last, being unique and without example, showed that Ethel was not in earnest.

On the back of his victory, Moonlight dispatched Jeff with word to Mr. Hanrahan and Merchant Wright. These good gentlemen were thrown into vast excitement as the result of that word, and the same night sent a fleet messenger to Frosty in Austin. The latter personage closed his gambling den temporarily, and took the trail of a preacher who had been pointed out as having come west for his health, and possessing no present pulpit.

Following a conference with the churchman, Frosty wrote a hasty line to Merchant Wright. It was in these words:

DEER BOB:

I send a sky-pilot to you an' Ned by next buckboard. I told him you wanted to open a game for him—a church, I mean—at the 'Dobe Walls. Please make my bluff good, as I hate to lie to a preacher for fear of bad luck. You can fake him up a pulpit in your storeroom or Ned's bar; an' perhaps he can pound a little religion into Locoed Charlie. It might do Charlie a heap of good;

who can say? Give my regards to Old Tom Moonlight, an' tell him that, while I usually "copper" a weddin', havin' lost heavily at the game myse'f, I am playin' his comin' nuptials to win, for the limit. Yours truly, FROSTY.

As though marriage were in the very air, Red River cantered in from the Dove's Nest, and informed Moonlight that he meant to marry the Firelight.

"Which I'm simply honin' for her," said the plaintive Red River.

Moonlight, quite naturally, asked what he had to do with the matrimonial designs of Red River, he, Moonlight, having troubles of his own. The faithful Red River explained that he was as yet weak from the knife thrust in his side, and did not feel equal to beating out the question with Ironjacket to a successful issue. It was in his thoughts that Moonlight would be proud to act as his friend with Ironjacket —still smoking in celebration of that battle at the Dove's Nest.

Moonlight kissed Ethel, and said he must ride southward, briefly, to the Palo Duro. She replied that she was glad, having much to do in a millinery way, and the time short.

Moonlight found Ironjacket enveloped in meditation and tobacco smoke. He related to that chieftain the loves of the Firelight and the sighing Red River.

"What is my father's 'price'?" asked Moonlight, who was versed in Kiowa customs.

Ironjacket smoked and thought with abysmal gravity for five minutes, while Moonlight rolled a patient cigarette. Then he took his pipe from his mouth, and spoke as follows:

"I would give the Firelight to my son without a

'price.' But he is a 'bear,' and she is a 'bear,' and 'bears' cannot marry. The Red River one, however, is different."

Ironjacket then explained that a certain disagreeable savage, surnamed Big Turtle, was a member of that particular band of Kiowas which he, Ironjacket, honored with his citizenship. The despicable Turtle owned a fleety roan; and the speed of that roan gave him prominence beyond his due. Red River must get Ironjacket a pony that should beat the miserable Turtle's roan; that was the "price" for the Firelight.

Away, for a second time, flew a messenger to the invaluable Frosty. Having a wide sporting experience, it was among things sure that Frosty would be able, in or about Austin, to pick up a racing pony, capable of turning the vainglorious Turtle's roan into a jest.

Frosty showed himself worthy the trust reposed in him. There came presently to the Panhandle, at the tail of one of Scotty's mail wagons, an ox-eyed, gentle little bay, nostril like a tiger-lily, coat of satin. Frosty sent private word that the satin bay could "turn down an antelope in a quarter-mile dash for money, marbles or chalk."

However that might have been, with Red River in the saddle, it went by the roan of the boastful Turtle as though that ignoble mustang were tied to a tree. Ironjacket went up above the contemptible Turtle, as a social consequence, in Rabbit Ear first circles. Also Red River took the Firelight to wife, the feat being accomplished by the simple rite of eating off the same dish with that maiden, after the custom of the Firelight's ancestors for all time.

It was evening at the Bar-Z. The next morning the household would ride down the Canadian to the Red Bull's, since the wedding of Don Anton and the Doña Inez was now but two days away. Moonlight brought out the yellow Don Lopez casket, and placed it on the table. Jeff was called in from the camp house, where he had been exchanging mendacities with the Bar-Z riders, one of whom was reckoned the Ananias of the Panhandle.

When all were gathered about the little golden box, Moonlight spoke up.

"What is inside," said he, "is to be Ethel's. One day she will be a wife, I trust"—there was a glimmer of humor about the gray eyes—"and this is her marriage gift from me. The three several interests besides my own I shall meet in money."

"And what interests are they?" asked the Professor innocently.

"Yours, Jeff's and Red River's," returned Moonlight. "However," he continued, interrupting the Professor, who was evidently about to enter a protest so far as he was mentioned, "let's defer argument until we see what we have."

"Shore!" interjected Jeff, whose curiosity was as the curiosity of a girl; "let's see the inside."

Moonlight insinuated the blade of his bowie between the lid and the body of the yellow casket. It hung fire a moment, and then suddenly burst open all at once. There were several water-soaked withered scraps of parchment, of which nothing might now be made, rotted and defaced as they were by time and the elements. The balance of the contents Moonlight spilled out upon the table.

The tale was easily made; they counted a score of diamonds, most of them running from one karat to as heavy as three, and all of admirable purity. Among them as distinguished from the others were three immense lozenge-shaped stones of a first water. The emeralds numbered no more than five, one being a great tallow-drop that would have ransomed a rajah. As the Monk's memorandum set forth, the bulk of the Don Lopez treasure was made up of rubies. Of these there seemed to be an endless store, more than Ethel might have held in both small hands. They burned and sparkled on the white table-cloth like fragments of blood-red fire. The queen of the collection was a mighty ruby, purest pigeon blood for color, big as a pigeon's egg for size.

"No monarch," declared the expert, to whom they were afterward submitted—"no monarch has such a ruby! There is no other on earth! Value? It is beyond a value, being—water and color and size—in a class by itself."

It was a study in expression to observe the five faces, that Bar-Z evening, as they bent over those Don Lopez rubies. Aunt Tilda looked startled, and a little alarmed. Ethel's color came and went, while her eyes were a bright match for the brightest of the diamonds. The Professor was elated; but it was purely a scientific elation, accentuated with a little pardonable vanity, when he remembered the windbreak and the manner of that treasure's recovery. As for Jeff, he of all was least impressed; for, as he himself explained, when it came to gems and kindred trinketry his was the deepest ignorance.

"To show me them things," he said, when the Pro-

fessor asked his opinion, "is like peltin' a pig with pearls, as the Scriptures remarks. They shore ought to look a heap gala, however, on the little girl," he went on, glancing admiringly at Ethel. "The Cap'n's right; she's the one that heaven meant them for, when it made 'em."

Moonlight, while he looked at the gems, saw only Ethel in them.

"Are they all for me?" asked Ethel, catching her breath. "They should belong to an empress!"

"And so they shall, little one," returned Moonlight, and his look spoke even more; "so they shall. They are for the pretty empress of my heart!"

## CHAPTER XXV

### WEDDING BELLS AND SOMERSET

All was joy and magnificent preparation at the Cross-8. Sheep by the flock and cattle by the herd were sacrificed, while casks upon casks of strong waters were broached, to the end that those heavy of heart be upborne. There were cock fighting, and pony racing, and monte, and eating and drinking and dancing without end.

The day before the one set for the wedding of Don Anton with the Doña Inez, Merchant Wright and Mr. Hanrahan appeared at the Cross-8. They brought with them, on one of Scotty's buckboards, a slim, nervous personage, who seemed ill at ease, as one not sure of his surroundings or the purpose of his coming. While they tried to act otherwise, it was apparent that Mr. Hanrahan and Merchant Wright were on hawklike guard over the slim, nervous personage.

"Me and Bob," whispered Mr. Hanrahan to Moonlight, "has been worried sick for fear this yere gospel sharp gets away."

Moonlight thanked Mr. Hanrahan and Merchant Wright for their sleepless solicitude.

The slim, nervous personage made straight for Aunt Tilda. She smacked of civilization, and therefrom he drew comfort and a feeling of security.

"It's all so strange!" he said to Aunt Tilda. "I

was sought out by a plausible gentleman in Austin, who said that a church and congregation awaited me at a place called the 'Dobe Walls. I came, and found only a store and a rude rum-shop. These gentlemen, to whom I had been directed, told me I might preach in either structure. When I asked about a possible congregation, they pointed to a creature called 'Locoed Charlie,' who was hopelessly unsettled in his mind. Then they prevailed upon me to accompany them hither, saying my services would be required at a wedding."

Aunt Tilda did much to reassure the slim, nervous personage. That reference to his intended participation in a wedding mystified her; she mentioned it a little later to Moonlight.

"I had supposed their own padre would marry them," she said.

Moonlight, the fraudulent, whispered something to Aunt Tilda which took that good lady's breath away.

"But surely—" she began, in wonder and remonstrance.

Moonlight, the fraudulent, smothered her, diplomatically, with kisses. When she attempted another start, he repeated his diplomacy. For one so lately reclaimed from barbarism, he had attained a fine knowledge of the convincing character of kisses and their value as arguments, when a woman would debate. Aunt Tilda's objections lost their feet before the Moonlight diplomacy, and the good lady gave way. There would be a double wedding at the Cross-8.

Her objections being overthrown, Aunt Tilda was so generous as to relieve the vigils of Mr. Hanrahan

and Merchant Wright. She herself took charge of the slim, nervous personage, who gave his name as "Rev. Poinsette Jones."

Mr. Hanrahan and Merchant Wright were deeply grateful to Aunt Tilda. They would now refresh themselves, and unbuckle politely under the mellowing hospitality of the Red Bull, who had been made radiant by their coming. They were of the Panhandle aristocracy, and in their advent the Red Bull caught a glimpse of his restoration to that place among Americans which he had sacrificed for the hand and the flocks and the herds of his late Mexican spouse. Mr. Hanrahan and Merchant Wright accepted the friendly attentions of the Red Bull with a nice commingling of graciousness and distance, which did not wholly shut the door on the Red Bull's hopes.

The old Spanish padre and the Rev. Poinsette Jones conferred. Later they announced that they would conjointly, and side by side, officiate at both weddings.

"That, Ned," observed Merchant Wright, "is what I call pooling their issues."

"Rather," returned Mr. Hanrahan, referring in his thoughts to the high contracting parties, "they aims not only to hobble, but side-line 'em. Or it's like throwin' a pony with two ropes at once."

The double arrangement delighted the Doña Inez, who rejoiced in novelties. She would have liked a cathedral, a choir, an organ and four pages to hold up her train; but these embellishments were not practicable on the Canadian.

After the ceremony there was the official *baile*, wanting which no Mexican wedding would really be a wedding. The Doña Inez and Moonlight danced

together. Ethel looked on pleased and not jealous. Don Anton, as on a former evening, smoked a cigarette and posed as the picture of that languid, supercilious inanity proper in a young *rico*.

At the end of the dance the Doña Inez brought Moonlight to Ethel.

"He does not dance so well as he did," she said. Then, to Moonlight, "You have become civilized, that is the trouble. You are no longer savage enough." Later, she whispered to Ethel, "The Mother of all happiness must have smiled when you were born; that is why you have a god to love. Yes," looking across at Moonlight, who had joined Mr. Hanrahan and Merchant Wright, "he is one whom a woman might follow barefoot through life!" Her eye fell upon the languid Don Anton, propped against the wall. "What a foolishness is marriage! And for that matter, what a foolishness is life!"

In the face of this cynicism the Doña Inez looked complacent, even happy, as Ethel was bound to observe.

"This is the remarkable thing," said Aunt Tilda to the Professor. "Ethel was in love with Nephew Alan when I spoke to her of Robert. But—and this is what baffles me—when and where did she learn to love him?"

"They love each other now, my dear Madam," returned the Professor, "and we may safely rejoice over that."

"It is," retorted Aunt Tilda loftily, "natural for a man to be satisfied with nothing more than a result. But a woman goes deeper; aside from a mere result, she demands to know the cause."

Red River was at the *baile*, but he did not dance. He said that his wound was not yet healed. The Firelight was also present, and her black eyes were never off Red River. Jeff, the disgruntled, privily scoffed at Red River's excuse; he said it was no wound, but fear of the Firelight that had so tamed him.

"An' to think, Professor," remarked Jeff, shaking sadly the while his head, "that boy was once as free as antelopes!"

The Professor and Jeff were together a deal throughout the evening. And wherefore no? They were fellow scientists, brother engineers, comrades, what you will! After the fourth visit to the refreshment room, they went about arm in arm. Jeff declared that the Professor was without doubt the most highly educated gentleman it had ever been his fortune to meet, while the Professor averred that in Jeff he found a mine of information not taught by schools nor discoverable in books.

The old *guiterero*, being a Mexican with a memory, sang a song in exaltation of the Professor, which for hyperbole was never matched or mated throughout the broad Southwest. For this attention, the Professor—who believed in rewarding minstrelsy—filled the old *guiterero's* claw with saffron gold; a generosity which so worked upon that bard as to cause him to tear the very soul from his shivering instrument in requital.

At one crisis, carried away on the currents of the occasion, the Professor boldly proposed for Aunt Tilda's hand. Here were the two clergymen, he said; they ought to have employment. A third wedding would be unexpected; it would for that rea-

son, he urged, be the more rapturously received, since humanity, whether American or Mexican, ever reveled in surprise. The Professor waxed eloquent, but his eloquence met only with rebuke.

"You should think on our years, Professor," exclaimed Aunt Tilda, settling her plumage.

"I do think on our years," protested the desperate Professor, "and it is for the very reason of our years that I favor haste."

Aunt Tilda, however, was obdurate; Robert and the proprieties must be remembered. She conceded nothing to the Professor's suit, beyond a promise to take up the subject of his "heart and happiness"—for those were the words of the Professor—when they again found themselves back in old Somerset.

The beneficent Red Bull drew the Rev. Poinsette Jones aside, and in the name of Moonlight and himself bestowed upon that divine such a donative, in lawful money of the realm, as caused both his pockets and his eyes to bulge. The Rev. Poinsette Jones was overcome, and said that the Panhandle, while wild, was not niggardly.

"I have loved you much," whispered the Doña Inez to Ethel, when they parted; "I shall always love you! You will now go the long miles back to your own country. But you will never forget. You will think, now and then, of your friends on the Concha and on the Canadian."

Five years roll rearward. The great white Gordon mansion, buried in its Somerset trees, is again a theater of life and happiness. Moonlight, no longer Moonlight but Alan Gordon, is acclaimed by all the

Eastern Shore as a very flower among Gordons. Ethel, beautiful as a girl, is even more beautiful as a matron. There is little Alan, aged four, who, with his father's gray eyes and high nobility of face, has the dark hair of his mother. There is little Ethel, aged two, who with her love and gentleness, and soft dark hair and eyes, is wholly her mother's girl. The hospitality and the quiet, fine culture of the Alan Gordons are watchwords along the Chesapeake. Ethel, with those Don Lopez rubies—known from Baltimore to Savannah, and north to New York, as the Gordon rubies—blazing at brow and throat, looks on those state occasions when she wears them more imperial than could any empress.

Down the hill from the great Gordon mansion a little mile, lives Aunt Tilda in that cottage which was once the home of Ethel, Robert and herself. She has changed from Aunt Tilda Hempstead to Aunt Tilda Doremus, and her husband, the good Professor, is with her.

Jeff, the impartial, maintains an unbroken residence with both households. His only serious charge is the care of President. With his share of the Don Lopez rubies, turned into cash by Moonlight, he has bought an annuity which—for Jeff is along in years—requires five figures in its annual telling.

"Life insurance," says Jeff, "I'm ag'in, as bein' a game wherein a gent has to die to win. But annooities is plumb different. In annooities, you-all lives to win; which is more my style."

Jeff collects his five-figure annuity quarterly, and spends most of it on the neighbors. He has a high place in Somerset society, of which he is the Mun-

chausen, the Mandeville and the Marco Polo. The children call him "Uncle Jeff," and the grown-ups call him "Colonel."

Red River, with Firelight, is prosperously in cattle at the Bar-Z. Moonlight refused every interest he might have in that property, as a relative by blood of Robert, and insisted that Aunt Tilda take all. Then he paid her out with a round twenty thousand dollars, and gave the Bar-Z to Red River. That was to be the latter's share in those Don Lopez rubies.

Moonlight procured a value to be put on those rubies, and the guarded finding of the expert placed them at a rotund million. Acting on this estimate, and remembering the request of the dead Jose, Moonlight dispatched a draft on London, for an even one hundred thousand dollars, to the head of the Society of Jesus, then resident in Barcelona. The holy man saw in the draft a manifestation of that benign Providence which had ever watched over his order.

Jeff, the excursive, goes each autumn to the Panhandle, on what he calls a tour of inspection. When he returns he relates the news. His last report ran to this effect:

Red River and the Firelight have two children—boys. These are named respectively "Alan Gordon" and "Jefferson Horne."

"Nacherally," observed Jeff, "I ain't wholly satisfied with the color of them infants, havin' an undoo prejewdice for white, myse'f; but for all that, I'm yere to say that them children has their p'ints. Also, Red River allows he'll never rest content till he's had three more, an' named 'em for the balance of us."

The Red Bull, according to Jeff, is slowly but surely regaining caste among Americans. He makes a specialty, too, of peace and friendship with Red River and the Bar-Z people—a piping condition despised by Ironjacket who, with Southwind, has headquarters at his new son's. Ironjacket maintains that a tidy, well-nursed feud with the Red Bull could not fail of advantage.

"In peace," argues Ironjacket, "the waters run dry, and the grass dies. There is no good in peace. He who would be rich and happy must have plenty of war."

Mr. Hanrahan and Merchant Wright flourish at the 'Dobe Walls, and Scotty carries the mails. As for Frosty, that intelligent speculator has given up faro bank for a bank of the National variety.

"Which faro bank," says Frosty, "has nothin' in its favor but the 'splits.' Whereas a National bank, as ag'inst them puerile 'splits,' possesses advantages which I should shore blush to unfold."

Over on the Concha dwell the Doña Inez and Don Anton. The latter is as narrowly inane as ever, while the Doña Inez makes existence one long *sieste*, broken only by chocolate and cigarettes. She sends her love and a kiss to Ethel, and says she has not seen a man along the Canadian, or on the Concha, since the Señor Moonlight left.

Moonlight, of all who have marched in these pages, is the happiest; and he lays his happiness at the gentle door of Ethel, whom he believes in and reveres as the high-priestess of civilization.

"My father was right," declares Moonlight; "I was a Throwback. If he erred, it was in not reckon-

ing on the power of reclamation that lives in a woman's love."

He draws Ethel to him as he says this, and the kiss which puts a period to his wisdom is as vivid as was that other kiss on a battle-splintered morning at the Dove's Nest.

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